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INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF PROVERBS.

THE TITLE OF THE BOOK.—"The Proverbs of Solomon." There is no necessity, from this title, for considering the collection, in the precise state in which we now have it, as the work of Solomon. The proverbs which the book contains were all his; but the selection and arrangement of them appear, from the very statements of the book itself, to have been made by different hands. In chapter xxv. 1 we read, "These are also proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out." "The men of Hezekiah" were, without question, "holy men of God," prophets, appointed by that eminently pious prince to the execution of the good work. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) The Book of Proverbs is not to be regarded simply as a collection of wise sayings, genial sentiments, prudent guesses, or affectionate exhortations. The book may be viewed, on the contrary, as representing the very science of practical philosophy. Proverbs are condensed philosophies. Sometimes proverbs are condensed histories. Wise men who speak even about "earthly things" are often obliged to have recourse to "dark sayings." Some truths can only be hinted at; some reforms can only be outlined, and then can only be shown as if in twilight; there are dark things in life for which names can be found only by a kind of spiritual genius; there are also possible reforms or re-arrangements of life which even the proposers hardly realise in all their scope and uses—hence even reformers and spiritual teachers of every kind have often expressed themselves darkly, suggestively, tentatively, so much so that their hesitation has been misunderstood and mocked by fluent ignorance and superficial ability. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) A proverb, strictly speaking, is a short moral sentence, which means something further than what the words literally imply. Most of Solomon's proverbs are rather to be called maxims or sentences. The characteristic feature of this kind of writing is brevity, much thought in a small compass; as in a seed is contained the whole power of vegetation which is to produce the tree. And the obscurity attendant on "these words of the wise, and their dark sayings," is not altogether without its uses. It whets the understanding, excites an appetite for knowledge, and keeps alive the attention by the labour of the investigation, giving an increased pleasure to the discovery of truth, by having called forth our efforts to attain it. (*B. E. Nicholls, M.A.*) These proverbs of Solomon are a collection of wise and moral sayings, usually plain and concise; they are also of the poetical kind, and fall into metre, and therefore were the more easily learned and remembered by those in whose language they were written. They have not that air of smartness, and vivacity, and wit which modern writers have usually affected in their maxims and sentences; but they have what is better—truth and solid good sense. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) The word which forms the present title of the book calls for special notice. The Greek *παροιμία*, the Latin *proverbium*, express only the fact that the saying so described is current among men, a "by-word," differing in its origin, it may be, from other words, at first out of the way, afterwards common and familiar. The Hebrew word

for proverb (*mashâl*) has a much more definite significance. Its root-meaning is that of comparison, the putting this and that together, noting likeness in things unlike. It answers, *i.e.*, to the Greek *παραβολή* rather than *παροιμία*. The primary idea of a Hebrew proverb, traceable throughout the book, in spite of the wider range of meaning which the word subsequently acquired, is that of comparison and similitude. The words of chapter xxvi. 7, "The legs of the lame are not equal: so is a parable in the mouth of fools," which speak of the *mashâl* in this sense, are also the best illustration of its meaning. That it was applied also to moral apothegms of varying length, pointed and pithy in their form though there might be no similitude, is evident enough throughout the book. Elsewhere it is used with a partial extension of its meaning in another direction. Discourses in which there is more or less of a poetic character, even though there be no formal comparison, and no didactic result, are described as "parables." (*Dean Plumptre*.) I shall not very much observe any reference which these proverbs have the one to the other, because I conceive them to be as a heap of corn, wherein every grain is weighty, but they have little connection the one with the other. But this let me note of them, that these proverbs, far surpassing others, do not only contain an inward pith of excellency in the proverbial sense of them, but even in the husk and outward letter do deliver precious things and of great use unto us. (*Michael Jermin*.)

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK.—The Jewish tradition ascribed the Proverbs, or Sayings of the Wise, to Solomon, just as it ascribed the Psalms, or inspired lyrics of the poets, to King David, and we may add, just as it ascribed all the gradual accretions and developments of the law to Moses. But even a very uncritical reader will observe that the Book of Proverbs as we have it is not the work of a single hand; and a critical inquiry into the language and style of the several parts, and also into the social and political conditions which are implied by them, has led scholars to the conclusion that, at the most, a certain number of Solomon's wise sayings are included in the collection, but that he did not in any sense compose the book. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) It is not necessary to suppose that Solomon is the author of all the proverbs in this book. He may have been the collector or editor, as well as the originator. Let us regard the proverbs as a moral note-book, or practical guide to life; it will then be doubly interesting to look into a guide drawn up by no less an authority than "Solomon the son of David, king of Israel." It should be keenly interesting to us to know what such a man has brought back from the fields of experience, and what he has set down with the sanction of his own name. Solomon had swept the whole circle of social experience. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WORK.—The book may be divided into five parts. Part 1 is a sort of preface, extending from chapter i. to chapter ix. The teacher gives his pupil a connected series of admonitions, cautions, and encouragements to the study of wisdom. Part 2, from chapter x. to chapter xxii. 16, comprises what may be strictly called proverbs, *i.e.*, unconnected sentences expressed with much neatness and simplicity. Part 3 reaches from chapter xxii. 17 to chapter xxiv.; in it the teacher renews his connected admonitions to the study of wisdom. Part 4 extends from chapter xxiv. to chapter xxix. It contains proverbs supposed to have been selected from some larger collection of Solomon by the men of Hezekiah. This part, like the second, consists of unconnected sentences. Part 5 comprises the two last chapters. The first of these contains the wise observations and instructions delivered by Agur to his pupils Ithiel and Ucal; the other, the excellent lessons addressed to King Lemuel by his mother. The description of the virtuous woman (chapter xxxi. 10-31) is by some considered to be a separate poem. (*B. E. Nicholls, M.A.*) Though the composition be of the disjointed kind, yet there is a general design running through the whole which the author keeps always in view, and that is, to instruct the people, and particularly young people, at their entrance into public and active life, to give them an early love and an earnest desire of real wisdom, and to lay down such clear rules for their behaviour as shall carry them through the world with peace and credit. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) The main body of proverbs is the collection which begins at chapter x. and ends at chapter xxii. 16. This collection has certain distinct features which mark it off from all that precedes and from all that follows. All these proverbs are identical in form—each is expressed in a distich. (There is an apparent exception in

chapter xix. 7.) The general drift of their teaching is quite uniform, the morality indicated is of no very lofty type; the motives for right conduct are mainly prudential; there is no sense of mystery or wonder, no tendency to speculation or doubt. A few scattered precepts occur which seem to touch a higher level, and to breathe a more spiritual air. But these may have been added by the author of chapters i. to ix. To this collection is added an appendix (xxii. 17 to xxiv. 22), which opens with an exhortation addressed by the teacher to his pupil. The literary form of this appendix falls far behind the style of the main collection. We are evidently brought down to a later period in Israel's melancholy history. Another brief appendix follows (xxiv. 23-34), in which the distich form almost entirely disappears. Chapters xxv. to xxix. contain an entirely new collection, which was made in the literary court of Hezekiah, about 250 years after the time of Solomon. In this collection there is no uniformity of structure such as distinguished the proverbs of the first collection. The book closes with three quite distinct passages, which can only be regarded as appendices. The two collections, with their several appendices, were at some favourable point in religious history, possibly in those happy days of Josiah when the Deuteronomic Law was newly promulgated to the joyful nation, brought together, and, as we should say now, edited, with an original introduction by an author who, unknown to us by name, is among the greatest and noblest of Biblical writers. The first nine chapters of the book, which form the introduction to the whole, strike a far higher note, appeal to nobler conceptions, and are couched in a much loftier style than the book itself. The writer bases his moral teaching on Divine authority rather than on the utilitarian basis which prevails in most of the proverbs. Writing in a time when the temptations to a lawless and sensual life were strong, appealing to the wealthier and more cultured youth of the nation, he proceeds in sweet and earnest discourse to woo his readers from the paths of vice into the Temple of Wisdom and Virtue. His method of contrasting the "two ways," and exhorting men to shun the one and choose the other, constantly reminds us of the similar appeals in the Book of Deuteronomy; but the touch is more graphic and more vivid; the gifts of the poet are employed in depicting the seven-pillared House of Wisdom and the deadly ways of Folly; and in the wonderful passage which introduces Wisdom appealing to the sons of men, on the ground of the part which she plays in the creation and by the throne of God, we recognise the voice of a prophet—a prophet, too, who holds one of the highest places in the line of those who foretold the coming of our Lord. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) With regard to the arrangement and structure of the Book of Proverbs, it may be observed that ancient interpreters divided it into five parts, like the books of Moses and the Psalms. The first part, or book, which is introductory to the rest, consists of chapters i. to ix. inclusive. The second part extends from chapter x. to xxiv. inclusive. The third part of it is composed of proverbs of Solomon copied out and added by the men of Hezekiah, and comprises chapters xxv. to xxix. The fourth part contains the words of Agur—probably a symbolical name of Solomon—and is formed of chapter xxx. The last part is chapter xxxi., the words of King Lemuel, probably another symbolical title of Solomon himself. These five parts of the proverbs are not thrown together promiscuously, loosely, and incoherently, but they have their special characteristics and peculiar organisation. (*Bp. Chris. Wordsworth.*)

THE ETHICAL TEACHING OF THE BOOK.—It will, perhaps, be slighted on account of its contents, as a mere system of dry morality, by those who had rather deal in discourses of the mystic or enthusiastic kind, and admire that sort of rapturous and ecstatic devotion. But whether they will allow it or no, this book contains the main parts of pure and undefiled religion, and lays down the best of rules for the prudent conduct of life, and for obtaining the favour of God and the testimony of an approving conscience. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) The careful reader of this book will receive the instructions of that wisdom which directs men to practise justice regulated by discretion and tempered by moderation and mercy. It teaches us our duty to God and man, and leads us in every good path. Solomon could have given us lectures on astronomy and poetry, on the nature of birds and beasts, and everything that attracts the curiosity of many; but as the wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, he is directed by the Spirit of God to give us in this book the instructions of Divine and moral wisdom, to remain for the use of men till the latest posterity. (*George Lawson, D.D.*) Wisdom is the general topic of the whole book: that sound, practical judgment in affairs of life which yields good

citizenship, honourable success in commercial and public affairs, virtuous and contented household life. The first nine chapters form a connected discourse, in which wisdom is personified. Not grey-eyed Pallas Athene was so majestic or so winsome. This stately figure is both queen and counsellor; her haunt is no retired tower, or nun's cell, but the market-place, the bazaar, the court-room, the public square. Not great learning or charm of wit is her requirement, but sound behaviour in the sight of God and man. (*Charles M. Southgate.*) Broadly speaking, the wisdom of the Hebrews covers the whole domain of what we should call science and philosophy. It is the consistent effort of the human mind to know, to understand, and to explain all that exists. It is, to use the modern phrase, the search for truth. But by wisdom is meant not merely the search, but also the discovery; not merely a desire to know, but also a certain body of conceptions ascertained and sufficiently formulated. While Wisdom embraces in her wide survey all things in heaven and in earth, there is one part of the vast field which makes a special demand upon human interest. The proper study of mankind is man. Very naturally the earliest subject to occupy human thought was human life, human conduct, human society. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) The general idea of wisdom is, that it consists in the choice of the best ends, and of the best means for their attainment. This definition admits of application both in a lower and in a higher department. In the first place it may be applied to the whole conduct of human life, in all its daily intercourse and ordinary transactions, and amidst all its varied circumstances. We stand in different relations; we occupy different conditions; we are subjected to different trials; we are exposed to different temptations; our lot is characterised by different changes, difficulties, and perplexing incidents; one day, one hour, may shift our position, and require an entire alteration of our course. To accommodate our conduct to these variations—to suit to all of them the application of the great general principles and precepts of the Divine law, and to “guide our affairs with discretion” in them all—requires “wisdom.” And for enabling us to act our part rightly, creditably, and usefully, from day to day, there is, in this book, an immense fund of admirable counsel and salutary direction. And then, secondly, the knowledge of wisdom may be taken in its higher application to interests of a superior order, to spiritual duties, to the well-being of the better part, to all that regards true religion and the salvation of the soul. Wisdom, in this book, is generally understood in this its highest application, as might indeed be expected in a book of instructions from God. We would hardly imagine a communication from Him confined to the mere prudential and successful regulation of our temporal affairs. How important soever this may be in a life of which the personal and the social enjoyment, so long as it lasts, is to so great an extent made up of little things, and dependent on their due adjustment, yet in a Divine communication to man, as an immortal creature, and occupying a position, in regard to God and his everlasting destinies, so peculiar, and so pregnant with interesting results, we cannot conceive these to be the only, or even the principal, subjects. Nor are they. They are in every way subordinate. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*)

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS FOR HOMILETIC PURPOSES.—The Words of the Wise, or Proverbs of Experience. Treasures in the House, or Proverbs of Home-Life. Closer than a Brother, or Proverbs of Friendship. The Reward of the Diligent, or Proverbs of Industry. The Suicide of the Soul, or Proverbs of Purity. The Principal Thing, or Proverbs of Wisdom. The Struggle with the Strong, or Proverbs of Counsel. The False Balance, or Proverbs of Trade. Wine a Mockery, or Proverbs of Temperance. The Issues of Life, or Proverbs of Restraint. The Better Choice, or Proverbs of Integrity. The Shining Path, or Proverbs of Holiness. The Exaltation and Reproach of a Nation, or Proverbs of Politics. (*Bp. W. S. Perry.*)

THE BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR.

PROVERBS.

CHAPTER I.

VERS. 1-7. The proverbs of Solomon.—*The Book of Proverbs* :—1. The book does not consist of proverbs entirely. Much of it is the language of pious exhortation and spiritual precept. 2. The book contains many worldly precepts. Some have a selfish, secular sound. But—(1) It is well to inquire whether the supposed purely prudential maxim is really so entirely a citizen of this world as it seems to be. (2) It is well to remember that many even of our Saviour's discourses might seem open to the charge of being moral and social, rather than spiritual and heavenly. (3) Such precepts by implication convey the assurance that a religious life is intimately connected with worldly conduct; depends upon it; grows out of it; is bound up with it; fails or flourishes because of it. Illustrate by suretyship. 3. The pre-eminent place in the book is assigned to Wisdom, which is one of the names of Jesus Christ. 4. The proverbs contained in the book are peculiar in form. They are highly antithetical. They often contain a double or threefold antithesis. 5. The point of a proverb may often be missed by inattention; sometimes it needs acuteness to see the point. 6. The matter of the Proverbs calls for attention. Note how they concern the gift of speech, riches, and poverty, such sins as sloth. They proclaim great practical truths, and are often of great strength and sweetness. (*Dean Burgon.*) *The proverbs of Solomon* :—1. The proverbs of Solomon are pleasing to refined taste. He was a preacher accustomed to employ acceptable words full of pungent and profitable instruction. 2. In the second place, proverbs are practical in their use. True religion is not of the head only, nor of the heart only; it is the cultivator of all our faculties, and acts upon our whole person, in its legitimate development, as the God of nature forms a tree or flower, unfolding all parts at the same time, breathing life and beauty on every leaf. The portion of sacred record now under consideration is of especial importance to young persons. The inculcation of duty is no less essential than the defence of doctrine. It is the symptom of a diseased condition, when a patient desires intoxicating draughts rather than wholesome aliment. When a religionist is more voracious of excitement than instruction, and is much more prompt to fight for a dogma than to illustrate his infallibility by a noble demeanour, he would do well to search into the divinity of a faith which is so barren of heavenly deeds. 3. Thirdly, sacred proverbs are ennobling in their tendency. (1) They present the most concise forms of wisdom. (2) In proverbs we have the most profitable type of wisdom. Their statements of doctrine may not be so explicit as in some later portions of Scripture, but what they do assert is of the very highest importance. In particular we are here taught to combine reflection with action—nourishing a mind that ponders over a heart that prays. (3) The proverbs of Solomon are invaluable, because they most clearly teach the importance of correct and immovable principles in the heart; conduct full of nobleness and integrity in every walk of life; the necessity and usefulness of self-discipline; and the importance of bringing every purpose as well as every act to the test of God's holy Word. 4. Fourthly, the scriptural maxims, the merits of which we are discussing, are not only pleasing to the taste, practical in their use, and ennobling in their tendency, but they are saving in their

design. (*E. L. Magoon.*) *Authoritative maxims*:—This is the meaning of the term "Proverbs" in the original. A proverb is a weighty sentiment, moral or prudential, expressed in sententious language. It is the recorded verdict of men, sealed by experience, and reserved for future guidance. The proverbs of a people have no small influence upon their character, and sometimes they have a very evil influence. Let one which is erroneous in its morality, or perverted in its application, become current, and it seems to give the sanction of reason, experience, and almost of inspiration to that which is wrong, *e.g.*, "Charity begins at home." This has nourished selfishness and checked benevolence. There is this advantage in a proverb, that it directs the conduct without perplexing the mind or burdening the memory. Proverbs are to the morals of a people what gold coin is to its currency—portable, rich, and always passable. The form in which the Bible proverbs are expressed is usually that of parallelism, or in two parts, the second line repeating the sentiment of the first, or sometimes its opposite. (*W. H. Lewis, D.D.*) *The preacher*:—Solomon went through a peculiar experience of his own, and God, who in nature gives sweet fruit to men through the root-sap of a sour crab, when a new nature has been engrafted on the upper stem, did not disdain to bring forth fruits of righteousness through those parts of the king's experience that cleaved most closely to the dust. The heights of human prosperity he had reached; the paths of human learning he had trodden farther than any in his day; the pleasures of wealth, and power, and pomp he had tasted in all their variety. The man who has drained the cup of pleasure can best tell the taste of its dregs. The fatal facility with which men glide into the worship of men is a reason why some of the channels chosen for conveying the mind of God were marred by glaring deficiencies. For engraving the life-lessons of His Word, our Father uses only diamonds; but in every diamond there is a flaw, in some a greater, and in some a less; and who shall dare to dictate to the Omniscient the measure of defect that binds Him to fling the instrument as a useless thing away? Two principles cover the whole case. "All things are of God." "All things are for your sakes." 1. The universality of God's government. 2. The special use for His own people to which He turns every person and every thing. Here is a marvel. Not a line of Solomon's writings tends to palliate Solomon's sins. (*William Arnot, D.D.*) *The proverbs of Solomon*:—No one subject is long pursued in this treatise, nor is there any coherence and connection between its parts. Yet there is a general design running through it, to instruct young people at their entrance into public and active life. This Book of Proverbs is short and soon read. It will perhaps be slighted on account of its contents, as a mere system of dry morality, by those who had rather deal in discourses of the mystic and enthusiastic kind, and admire that sort of rapturous and ecstatic devotion. But whether they will allow it or no, this book contains the main parts of pure and undefiled religion, and lays down the best of rules for the prudent conduct of life, and for obtaining the favour of God and the testimony of an approving conscience. By wisdom Solomon means true religion and virtue, as by folly he means disobedience and vice. Following is an abstract of the acts of religion and morality recommended by him. I. POSITIVE DUTIES. The foundation of religion is laid upon the principle of fearing God. He exhorts us to love wisdom and to prize it above all things, as the only way and the infallible way to obtain it. He exhorts us to love wisdom betimes, and to make it the first choice, the first object of our affections. He exhorts young persons to honour and obey their parents, and to regard their instructions. He advises discretion in choosing friends. He exhorts to chastity, purity, contentment, control of temper, meekness, mercifulness, industry, &c. II. NEGATIVE DUTIES. He dissuades from fornication and adultery, from sloth and idleness, from pernicious company; he advises to shun strife, contention, rebellion; to keep the heart free from irregular passions, and not to be vicious in any way, or oppressors. He exhorts to avoid suretyship as a most dangerous indiscretion. He teaches not to trust in riches, in friends, in superior abilities, nor to value ourselves for our oblations and sacrifices, for any of the externals or ceremonials of religion. He earnestly exhorts us not to be scoffers and scorners of religion. III. THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THESE MORAL DUTIES ARE ENFORCED, AND THE RECOMPENSES WHICH ARE PROMISED TO THOSE WHO PRACTISE THEM. And they are no less than every advantage that a man can reasonably desire in this life; they are the favour of God and His protection, and along with it the testimony of a good conscience, courage and confidence, safety from evil, long life, health, plenty, riches, honours, reputation both present and posthumous, and an inheritance that shall descend to

children's children. (*John Jortin, D.D.*) *Truths made compact and portable* :—The late Dr. James Hamilton said justly that we ought to be thankful to any one who makes a great truth portable. Our memories are weak. Like travellers in the desert or amidst Polar ice, we want to be lightly laden; and yet we must carry on our own shoulders the equipments required for all the journey. And some teachers have not the art of packing. They give out their thoughts in a style so verbose that to listen is a feat and to remember would be a miracle. Occasionally, however, there arises a master spirit, who in the wordy wilderness espies the important principle, and who has the faculty of separating it from surrounding truisms, and reproducing it in convenient and compact dimensions. From the mountain of sponge he extracts the ounce of iodine; from the bushel of dry petals he distils the flask of otto; or, what comes nearer our purpose, from bulky decoctions he extracts the nutritious or the fragrant particles, and in a few tiny packets gives you the essence of a hundred meals. Of such truth-condensers the most distinguished in our country is Bacon. "Knowledge is power." "They are two things—unity and uniformity." "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Truths like these flash like revelations, or shine as the most brilliant novelties on the page of our mighty thinker; but many of them are truths which he had heard discoursed by drowsy pedants, or vaguely muttered by the multitude, and it is the work of his genius to reduce vagueness to precision, and concentrate an ocean of commonplace into a single aphorism. By making the truth portable he made it useful. *Proverbial sayings of wise men* :—The seven wise men of Greece acquired their fame from the proverbial sayings they originated or adopted. Solon of Athens took for his motto, "Know thyself"; Chilon of Sparta, "Consider the end"; Thales of Miletos, "Who hateth suretyship is sure"; Bias of Priene, "Most men are bad"; Cleobulus of Lindos, "The golden mean," or "Avoid extremes"; Pittacos of Mitylene, "Seize time by the forelock"; Periander of Corinth, "Nothing is impossible to industry." (*Christian Million.*) *Profitable use of the Book of Proverbs* :—An old man, well known for his goodness, is full of sparkling epigrams, which he attributes to his habit of reading the Book of Proverbs through each month. (*F.B. Meyer, B.A.*) *Proverbs* :—A proverb is the child of experience.

Ver. 2. To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding.—*Wisdom and instruction* :—Wisdom is here taken for the theoretical part, to know the truth of things, as appears by the opposition of manners in the next verse. It may be meant of wisdom in general, knowledge of the truth; for many philosophical truths are contained in this book. But it hath a special eye to the knowledge of God and Divine truths. And it signifies an exact knowledge of things by their causes, or other properties, whereby we may be able to distinguish between real and apparent truths. The word "instruction" properly signifies the manner of teaching by which wisdom is attained. It is set after wisdom, because that is the end and perfection of instruction, and therefore more worthy than the means. "The end is first in intention, last in execution." Men think of dwelling before they think of building. It signifies such instruction as is communicated to boys, joined with correction, for the word imports both. "Understanding" means words of weight worthy to be understood, and well understood by those that delivered them; coming from men of great understanding, and making them such that learn them. Acute sentences, full of good matter, fit to pass for authentical like current money. Doctrines taught by this verse are—1. Wisdom is to be gotten out of Scripture. 2. Divine truths are far more excellent than other truths. 3. There is need of wisdom to guide both the understanding and the will. 4. Divine truths must be inquired into as well as Divine precepts. 5. Pains must be taken to distinguish real truths from apparent. Because they are hard to distinguish, they are worth distinguishing. 6. Instruction is the means to get wisdom out of Scripture. 7. Hearing Divine truth without understanding doth men no good. 8. Knowledge of trivial things is of little worth. 9. Knowledge of Divine truth will do us much good. It will bring us acquainted with God more fully than the creatures can. (*Francis Taylor.*) *Religion and virtue considered under the notion of wisdom* :—The principal scope of the Proverbs is to teach men wisdom. Wisdom is introduced in the dramatic way, as a divine person appearing in a very lovely form, displaying her native worth and beauty, and, by the most powerful persuasions, and the most affectionate manner of address, soliciting the degenerate sons of men to hearken to her counsels for their good. In general, what the author meaneth by wisdom is

true religion and virtue. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The fear of the Lord signifieth universal religion because it is an eminent part of it; and because it is a principle which, when the mind is duly possessed with, and brought thoroughly under its power, cannot fail of producing obedience to all the commandments of God. True religion is nothing else but the practice of virtue from a regard to the Deity. The wisdom recommended is called "the knowledge of the holy" (chap. ix. 10). Acquaintance with Divine objects, and with the duty we owe to God, is the truest understanding. It is not mere speculative knowledge even of religion he meaneth; the instructions of wisdom do all tend to practice; and the conformity of our lives to its rules is that only which will dominate us "wise men." The character of wisdom is applied to particular virtues. "To receive the instructions of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity." 1. Justice is a very important branch of our duty. 2. Another virtue is chastity. All kinds of voluptuousness and excess are directly contrary to wisdom. Slothfulness and neglect in government of the tongue are also signs of unwisdom. Observations: 1. That virtue and integrity, to be preserved from the ways of sin and wickedness, must be the result of deliberation and choice. Wisdom is the quality of a free-self-determining agent. Discretion consisteth in weighing maturely the motives of action, in comparing them together, and being determined freely by that which, upon the whole, appeareth to be the justest and the best. From this it is a plain consequence, that the more calm and sedate, the more deliberate and free our minds are in acting, our conduct is the wiser and the better. 2. That a good man useth foresight, and looketh to the last issue of things, that so he may direct his behaviour. Religion could not justly be called wisdom if it had not a view to the future consequences of our present conduct. If men believe there is a God, wise, just, and good, they must conclude that righteousness is pleasing to Him; and if the soul is immortal, and shall subsist in another state, they who have done good in this life have the best hope of being distinguished by the favour of the Deity in the next. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *A great teacher and a true learner*.—I. A GREAT TEACHER. 1. His history. He was—(1) The son of a great man. "Solomon the son of David," saint, hero, poet, king. (2) The king of a great people. King of Israel: the chosen of God, whose are the fathers. 2. His lessons. (1) Their form. He spoke in "proverbs." 3. His design. The true culture of the "simple." (1) Mental culture. Making them "to know wisdom," &c. (2) Moral culture. Teaching them "justice, and judgment, and equity." II. A TRUE LEARNER. 1. He is a wise man. He is wise who does the best thing. 2. He pays attention. "A wise man will hear." 3. He improves. He increases in "learning." He attains "unto wise counsels." He receives docilely into him the words of his master, and he rises in intelligence, and worth, and power. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment and equity.—*Judgment and equity*:—"Judgment" is used for discerning right from wrong; for the law, manner, or rule of it; for punishment or execution of judgment. "Equity" in Hebrew means, straight ways, that go on foreright, and even, like plains; when men go not uphill and downhill in their actions, but proceed in an even course. It signifies also a thing right in God's or man's eyes, which they approve as just and equal. Some understand by equity moderation, that we use not the extremity of the law, nor do all that we may. Others, integrity of mind in working and discerning. The doctrines suggested are—1. Matters of practice must not be perceived only, but received. There is a piercing of truth into the understanding, and a receiving of it into the judgment. 2. Knowledge is ordinarily received from others. 3. A spiritual wisdom is required to guide all our actions. 4. Every one's right must be preserved. 5. Men must study to know how to judge of interests. 6. Extremity of justice is not always to be used; moderation sometimes is to be exercised. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Ver. 4. To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.—*Subtilty for the simple*:—The word is sometimes taken in an ill sense, for a crafty wit to deceive others. Sometimes in a good sense, for understanding to prevent dangers that crafty men might bring upon us. So it is taken here. Compare "simple" with the Latin "fatuus," a fool. Simple comes from a verb which signifies to allure or seduce one that wants understanding of God's truths and will, and so is easily allured to any error or wickedness by good words, as giving credit to everything, because not able to examine things for want of judgment. He falls

into danger for lack of knowledge. The word also signifies one who wants foresight to prevent danger. 1. The Scripture contains a store of heavenly knowledge sufficient to inform simple persons. Note the store of heavenly mysteries in the Scripture; the clearness of them; the variousness of them. 2. Subtily for preventing of dangers is best learned out of the Scriptures. 3. We are naturally simple, and easily led into error. 4. The way to keep us from errors is the right understanding of Scripture. 5. Most danger of going astray is in the time of youth. 6. Bare knowledge is not enough, but discretion must be laboured for also. Knowledge is imperfect, and will need further augmentation by deliberation. And knowing men do things rashly oftentimes, being disturbed with passion. (*Ibid.*) *Good subtilty* :—This term suggests the very point of Solomon's advice. The young man who comes from a quiet home, where he has been under wise guidance, is really simple, unsophisticated, unused to the ways of the world, unfit to meet its temptations, and needing much good counsel and warning from those who are experienced in the world's ways. "Simple" here is not "silly," but guileless, unsuspecting, easily drawn aside, over-trustful. It is familiarly said that "experience is a dear school, but fools will learn in no other." Solomon urges on the young man that if he would be willing to learn, he might be saved from many bitter and even degrading experiences. There is an evil sense attaching to the word "subtily," from its association with the serpent that tempted Eve; but the better meaning of the word comes to view through Solomon's connecting it with other good and suggestive terms. He thinks that the young man, at the very outset of life, needs "wisdom," which we may take in the general sense of "culture"; an "instruction," that is, "discipline," "training," and "understanding," or the power of weighing, distinguishing, discriminating: and "wisdom," in the further sense of "thoughtfulness," the habit of looking things well round before we decide on our action. Impulsiveness is a constant weakness in young people. They act before they think. And "Justice," or the first principles of righteousness, by which all proposed conduct should be appraised, and "judgment," or the self-estimating which is virtually the same as a cultured and active "conscience," and "equity," or the various adjustment of "principles" to the different relationships of men, and the various circumstances in which they may be placed; and "discretion," or that kind of reticence which keeps the young man from being duped by false advisers. 1. Expect subtilty in those who would tempt you astray. Here the word takes its bad form, as crafty, designing, making good appearance in order to deceive; keeping back part of the truth, and so leaving a designedly false impression. See temptation of Eve. There is a good "suspiciousness," which is a safeguard. 2. Show subtilty in not readily yielding to the tempters. Here the word is used in a good sense. Be on your guard. Do not give your love to the first person who seeks it. Beware of the plausible man, and the flatterers. Be forewarned and so you will be forearmed. Keep your own counsel. See underneath, and do not be caught by mere outside glitter. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The simple man* :—Plato wrote on the door of his academy, "Let no man unskilled in geometry come hither." Solomon writes the very reverse on the door of his school, "Let the simple man come hither." (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Discretion* :—There are many more shining qualities in the mind of man, but there is none more useful than discretion; it is this, indeed, which gives a value to all the rest, which sets them at work in their proper times and places, and turns them to the advantage of the person who is possessed of them. Without it, learning is pedantry, and wit impertinence; virtue itself looks like weakness; the best parts only qualify a man to be more sprightly in his errors, and active to his own prejudice. (*W. Addison.*) *Discretion* :—A father that had three sons was desirous to try their discretion, which he did by giving to each of them an apple that had some part of it rotten. The first eats up his apple, rotten and all; the second throws all his away, because some part of it was rotten; but the third picks out the rotten, and eats that which was good, so that he appeared the wisest: thus, some in these days, for want of discretion, swallow down all that is presented, rotten and sound altogether; others throw away all truth, because everything delivered unto them is not truth, but surely they are the wisest and most discreet, that know how to try the spirits whether they be of God or not—how to choose the good and refuse the evil. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 5. A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.—*The increase of knowledge* :—I. NO MAN IS SO WISE BUT HE MAY LEARN MORE. And that both in theoretical and

practical knowledge, how to think better, and how to do better. Be not content with that measure of knowledge ye have, but labour still for more. II. MUCH KNOWLEDGE COMES IN AT THE EAR. Hearing and seeing are by Aristotle called the learned senses, because by these doors learning enters into the soul. Yea, and lips also. The ears are the conduit pipes of wisdom to convey it to us. III. THE SCRIPTURE BRINGS IN INCREASE OF KNOWLEDGE. Because—1. It is the highest book in the world. 2. All heavenly wisdom in other books comes from thence, as waters in rivers from the fountain. IV. SCRIPTURE LEARNING IS THE BEST LEARNING. It is the most profound knowledge. It is the most profitable. V. NATURAL PARTS WELL USED HELP MUCH IN RELIGION. Paul's learning was a great help to him, and Solomon's high reach. It is a wonder what may be attained by industry and God's blessing upon it. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Ver. 6. *The words of the wise and their dark sayings.*—*The words of the wise*:—Nothing can give a deeper insight into the character and genius of a people than their household words—those current maxims and sayings which influence their everyday life, the popular proverbs which pass from mouth to mouth. These are the expression of a people's inward life. It does not belong to a high state of civilisation to originate proverbs. One of our most homely maxims or proverbial sayings, will stir the soul to its very centre and depth, and do more to regulate the life and manners, than all the enactments in all the statute books of the world. In the Book of Proverbs we have nothing but the lessons of practical wisdom. They rest on great principles as their basis—those principles which enter into the eternal reason of things, and which are as unchangeable as God Himself. It follows that the maxims of this book are adapted to all time, all countries, and all people. Humanity is one. The writers, whoever they were, had a profound knowledge of men and things; and we have here the results of no narrow experience. Principles are stated with great clearness; the rule of conduct is laid down with consummate skill and precision, and the lofty aim of the whole is to allure men, and especially the young and inexperienced, into the way of happiness and peace. 1. Some maxims concern the relations which subsist between the young and the old. The young are to take part in the progress and development of the race. They are not only to be the fathers and mothers of a future generation, but also their teachers, and their models. To prepare and qualify them for this, they must have in them the elements of knowledge and of goodness. Youth is the period of acquisition. The present is always more or less dependent on the past. We cannot sever ourselves from those who have gone before us, nor break the bond which connects us with those who are coming after us. The young are to give the impression of their own intellectual and moral life to the generations following. 2. These maxims, though not set forth as coming immediately from the mind or spirit of God, are in harmony with Infinite Wisdom. They have in them nothing of a merely individual character. They contemplate man as man, independently of all outward arrangements and institutions, and deal with that which is common to the race. The Book of Proverbs stands unequalled among all the writings which the world has ever produced. They are human sayings, but possessed of Divine authority; and they have in them all those principles which can ennoble and dignify the character of man, clothing him with true greatness in this world, and in the world to come crowning him with glory everlasting. The following findings seem to come as near as may be to the end or object of the writer:—1. That a certain degree of instruction and knowledge is essential to intercourse with the more intelligent and better-informed classes. 2. That discretion, uprightness, and unyielding attachment to justice, are qualities of which youth stands most in need, and which enter into all integrity of character. 3. That youth being the period of greater simplicity and inexperience, it needs increased reflection and sagacity to lead to the apprehension and discovery of approaching temptation and danger, and of the best means of escape. 4. That even the wisest and best informed of men have ever something new to learn, and may by listening to the great oracle of truth, increase their knowledge and power of perception without limit. 5. That true wisdom has its basis in true piety, and that there can be no greater folly than to reject this highest form of knowledge. (*R. Ferguson, LL.D.*) *The dark sayings of the wise*:—Dark sayings mean properly enigmas or riddles. These were used of old as one of the methods of conveying instruction. It was conceived that by giving exercise to the understanding in finding out the solution of the enigma, it was calculated to deepen on the mind the impression of the lesson which was wrapt

up in it. This was not done for mere amusement, but for imparting serious instruction; although, to the young, there might in some instances be the blending of an intellectual attainment with the conveyance of useful information, or salutary counsel. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

Ver. 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.—*The first rudiments of knowledge*:—The fear of the Lord is an abiding and reverent sense of the presence of God and of accountableness to Him. For this to exist God must be that real, personal Being which we have every reason to believe God has revealed Himself to be: such in character, as to love, holiness, and justice, as He has declared Himself in His Word. Why is this fear the beginning of knowledge? 1. Because knowledge being the apprehension of facts, and application of them to life, it cannot properly begin, or be based on a right foundation, without first apprehending and applying a fact which includes and which modifies all other facts whatever. 2. Because knowledge is the food of the soul. And what is the soul? What ought its stores and its accumulated powers to be, and to be useful for? The knowledge which is to feed and train the soul must begin, continue, and end, in the apprehension of Him. 3. Because knowledge, as the mere accumulation of facts, is inoperative upon life. If you would be worth anything to society, worth anything to your own families, worth anything to yourselves, the fear of God must come first in your thoughts and lives. The fear of God is the first thing; the consciousness of Him about you, the laying down His revealed facts respecting Himself and you as your greatest facts; the setting up of His will as the inner law of your being. (Dean Alford.) *How is the "fear of the Lord" the beginning of knowledge?*—1. It quickens the intellect, and sustains its activity. 2. It restrains from those follies and corruptions which weaken the powers, and divert from high themes. 3. This fear starts thought from the right centre and in right directions. 4. This fear is the root of that right living and wise conduct, that forethought, purity, temperance, uprightness, and obedience to God, which we may call vital knowledge; knowledge in the heart and life, as well as in the head. (Monday Club Sermons.) *The root of knowledge*:—The "fear of the Lord" implies a right state of heart towards God, as opposed to the alienation of an unconverted man. Though the word is "fear," it does not exclude a filial confidence and a conscious peace. What God is inspires awe; what God has done for His people commands affection. See here the centrifugal and centripetal forces of the moral world. "Knowledge" and "wisdom" are in effect synonymous—the best knowledge wisely used for the highest ends. The "fear of the Lord" is the foundation, "knowledge" is the imposed superstructure. He who does not reverentially trust in God knows nothing yet as he ought to know. His knowledge is partial and distorted. The knowledge of God—His character and plans, His hatred of sin, His law of holiness, His way of mercy—is more excellent than all that an unbelieving philosopher has attained. It is a knowledge more deeply laid, more difficult of attainment, more fruitful, and more comprehensive, than all that philosophers know. Men speak of the stupendous effects which knowledge, in the department of mechanical philosophy, has produced on the face of the world, and in the economy of human life; but the permanence of these acquisitions depends on the authority of moral laws in the consciences of men. The moral encircles and controls the economic in the affairs of men. The knowledge of God is the root of knowledge. (William Arnot, D.D.) *A plea for reverence*:—Reverence is the alphabet of religion. As you cannot acquire knowledge without the knowledge of the alphabet, so you cannot acquire anything of the religious life without the spirit of reverence. Self-conceit is precisely the negative of reverence. It is the absence of the spirit that looks up to anything above us. It is the spirit that leads one to say, "I am the greatest and the best." There are many conditions in our life which tend to produce the spirit of self-conceit and tend to counteract the spirit of reverence. The absence of any traditions in America tend against the spirit of reverence. Across the ocean, in the Old World, we stand in cathedrals a thousand years or more old, in the presence of customs hoary-headed with antiquity; we walk by the city walls which have seen many a battle between liberty and despotism; and these old cathedrals, these old cities, these old customs, awaken in us some spirit of reverence. But we have no such cathedrals. The absence of any class distinctions in America tends against the spirit of reverence. We are all on the same level. There is no class to which we can look up with reverence. The reaction against Puritanism has tended against reverence. It is no longer customary in our homes to teach reverence of children to their parents, or in schools to teach

reverence of pupils to teachers. In the olden time every boy bowed reverently to the minister; now the minister gets along very well if the boy does not cry out, "Go up, thou baldhead!" The spirit of criticism, the scientific spirit, has tended against reverence. Many things which of olden time men superstitiously feared they fear no longer. We have analysed until all great things have been picked to pieces in our laboratory. (We will not allow any mysteries. You cannot revere what you are criticising. The two processes never can go on simultaneously in the same mind. The sectarian spirit has been against the spirit of reverence. The Congregationalist has sneered at the ritual of the Episcopalian, and the Episcopalian has shrugged his shoulders over the non-ritual of the Congregationalist. The spirit of antagonism between the different denominations has despoiled those symbols which were before the common objects of a mutual reverence. Finally, our democratic theology has tended against the old spirit of reverence. Just because we no longer reverence a king in the nation we do not reverence the King in the heavens. Now, if it be true that reverence is a fountain of life, and reverence is a beginning of wisdom, how in this age, under these circumstances, are we to develop reverence in ourselves, in our churches, and in our children? In the first place, then, the old notion of holy places is gone. We cannot recover it. In truth there is very little foundation for it. For if we are to substitute this larger, grander, more awe-inspiring conception—that every place is holy place, every ground is holy ground, and God is in all Nature. God is as truly here as He ever was in Palestine, as truly in the White Mountains or the Rocky Mountains as He ever was in the Sinaitic Mountains; He is everywhere, always speaking, in all phenomena. This must come into our hearts to take the place of the older and narrower conception of holy places. We cannot re-establish a united ritual, nor all agree to climb to God's throne by the steps "worn by the knees of many centuries." But we must learn the broader, the larger, more catholic, aye, and profounder reverence which sees God in every form of worship; for wherever the human heart is seeking God, there God is. We are to recognise Christ in all truth. The old reverence for the Bible as a book without any error whatever, and as a conclusive and final guide on questions of science, literature, history, philosophy, and religion, is passing away. Our reverence is not for the tables of stone that are broken and lost, nor for the words that were inscribed upon them—we do not know exactly what form of words were inscribed upon them—but for the great fundamental principles of the moral life which those Ten Commandments embody. There is many a man who has reverence for the book and none for the truth that is in the book. Woe to us if, throwing away the old mechanical reverence for the outer thing, we fail to get the deeper reverence for the inward truth! What reverence has God shown for truth! Think of it one moment. He has launched into human history this volume of literature. The ablest scholars are not agreed on such questions as who wrote these various books, at what dates, for what purpose, and with what immediate intent. The great majority of the books are anonymous; the great majority of them are without definite and positive date. What does this mean? It means this: God has launched truth without a sponsor into the world, and left the truth to bear witness to itself. Truth answers to the human mind as cog to cog; and the reverence for the shell is to be lost only that reverence for the kernel may take the place. We find it difficult, many of us, to have any reverence for the events that are taking place in America, and the leaders who are participating in them. We cannot cure that irreverence towards leaders and politicians by pretending respect for a man whom we do not respect, who has won his way to office by dishonourable and disreputable methods. We must go further, we must look deeper, we must see that, as God is in all worship and in all truth, so God is in all history. We are to see God in every man, and in all of life. There are times when there seems nothing more awe-inspiring than a simple, single human soul. Said Phillips Brooks once to me, "There is no man so poor, so ignorant, so outcast, that I do not stand in awe before him." As the old reverence for the priest and the robe and the pulpit fade away, reverence for man as the battle-ground between good and evil must come in to take its place, or reverence will disappear. "The fear of God is the fountain of life." I think it is Goethe who has drawn the distinction between fear and reverence. Fear, he says, repels; reverence attracts. It is not the fear of God that repels, it is the reverence for God which attracts, which is the fountain of life. And when this reverence has found its place in our hearts, it is to be the fountain of all our life; of our reason, and we are not to be afraid of being too rational; of our commercial industries, and we are not to be afraid of being too industrious; of

our humour, and we are not to be afraid of a good hearty laugh; reverence in all our life. You cannot have reverence on Sunday and irreverence in the week; reverence in the church and irreverence in the daily life. And, leaving in the past that reverence which was fragmentary, broken, and largely idolatrous, we are to press forward to a grander, broader, nobler, diviner reverence in the future. (*L. Abbott, D.D.*) *The fear of the Lord*.—1. The fear of God will urge us to a profitable study of the Holy Scriptures. 2. The fear of God will especially influence us in our devotions. 3. The fear of God will bring us to the business of the day in the right frame of mind to carry it on. 4. The fear of God will enable us to bear the trials and disappointments of life. 5. In the last trial of all, in the hour of death, we shall assuredly reap the fruit of having lived in the fear of the Lord, for then we shall have nothing else to fear. (*J. Edmunds.*) *Piety*.—I. PIETY IS REVERENCE FOR GOD. Filial reverence is meant by “fear.” Reverence implies two things, a recognition of Divine greatness, and a recognition of Divine goodness. An impression of goodness lies at the foundation of reverence, and hence, too, gratitude, love, adoration enter into this reverence. II. PIETY IS INITIATORY TO KNOWLEDGE. It is the beginning of it. But what knowledge? Not mere intellectual knowledge. Many an impious man knows the circle of the sciences. The devil is intelligent. It is spiritual knowledge—spiritual knowledge of self, the universe, Christ, and God. True reverence for God is essential to this knowledge. Religious reverence is the root of the tree of all spiritual science. He knows nothing rightly who does not know God experimentally. (*Homilist.*) *Filial love*.—Filial love stands near and leans on godliness. It is next to reverence for God. That first and highest commandment is like the earth’s allegiance to the sun by general law; and filial obedience is like day and night, summer and winter, budding spring and ripening harvest, on the earth’s surface. There could be none of these sweet changes and beneficent operations of nature on our globe if it were broken away from the sun. So when a people burst the first and greatest bond—when a people cast off the fear of God, the family relations, with all their beauty and benefit, disappear. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Practical piety*.—I. SPECULATIVE PIETY, OR A DUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AND OF OUR DUTY TOWARDS HIM, IS THE FIRST FOUNDATION OF TRUE WISDOM. 1. The proper exercise of true wisdom consists in directing and conducting us to the chiefest happiness which human nature is capable of. 2. That religion is the only method by which we are directed and conducted towards the attainment of this chief happiness. 3. That a due knowledge of God, and of our duty towards Him, is the basis and groundwork of true religion. II. PRACTICAL PIETY, OR THE REGULATING OF OUR ACTIONS ACCORDING TO KNOWLEDGE, IS THE HEIGHT AND PERFECTION OF UNDERSTANDING. 1. To be habitually conversant in the exercises of piety is an instance of the truest and most considerate wisdom, because it is the most effectual means to promote our happiness and well-being in this life. There are four things for the attainment of which we are chiefly solicitous. A clear reputation. A comfortable fortune. A healthful body. A quiet mind. 2. The constant exercise of religious duties is an instance of the truest and most considerate wisdom, because it is the most effectual means to promote our eternal happiness in the world to come. (*N. Brady.*) *A reverent fear of God*.—I. RELIGIOUSNESS, OR A REVERENT FEAR OF GOD, IS THE BEST WISDOM. Because it brings a man to acquaintance with God. It teaches us how to converse with God rightly by true worship and obedience, and how to come to live with God for ever. II. THINGS OF GREATEST WORTH SHOULD BE OF GREATEST ACCOUNT WITH US. The affections should ever follow the judgment well informed. III. IRRELIGIOUS PERSONS ARE IN GOD’S ACCOUNT THE FOOLS OF THE WORLD. They want God’s fear, as natural fools want wisdom. IV. NONE DESPISE HEAVENLY WISDOM BUT SUCH AS KNOW NOT THE VALUE OF IT. The excellency of it is so great, that it would allure men to look after it, had they spiritual eyes to see it. Knowledge hath no enemy but an ignorant man. V. THEY THAT SLIGHT THE MEANS OF KNOWLEDGE SLIGHT KNOWLEDGE ITSELF. We account so in outward things. We ask sick men refusing physic if they make no account of their lives. Neglect of the means of grace is a real slighting of wisdom. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Ver. 8. **Hear the instruction of thy father.**—*The family*.—The first and great commandment is the fear of God, and the second, which is next to it and like to it, is obedience to parents. Wherever the root is planted this is the first fruit which it bears. God honours His own ordinance, the family. He gives parents rank next after Himself. Filial love stands near, and leans on godliness. God is the author of the family constitution. Its laws are the marriage of one man with

one woman, the support of children by parents, and the support of decayed parents by the children grown. The polygamy of Eastern peoples has made the richest portions of the earth like a howling wilderness. In the constitution of nature there is a self-acting apparatus for punishing the transgression of the family laws. The Divine institute is hedged all round. The prickles tear the flesh of those who are so foolish as to kick against them. In practice, and for safety, it is well to keep families together as long as it is possible. To violate the providential laws is both a crime and a blunder. Love to parents ranks next under reverence to God. When France threw off the first commandment the second went after it. (*William Arnot, D.D.*)

For sake not the law of thy mother.—*For mother's sake*:—What a mysterious thing—what a mysterious, magical, Divine thing is a mother's love! How it nestles about the heart, and goes with the man, and speaks to him pure words, and is like a guardian angel! This young man (of whom he was then preaching) could never take any money that came to him from his mother and spend that upon a Sunday excursion or a treat to a theatre. It was a sacred thing with him; it had the impression and the inscription of his mother's image, and his mother's purity, and his mother's piety, and his mother's love. It was a sacred thing to him, and these things that he felt to be questionable, or felt to be sinful, were always to be provided for by other resources and by money that came to him from other hands. Oh! there is the poetry of the heart, the poetry of our home and domestic affections, the poetry of the religion of the heart and the altar, about that little incident, and it strikes me as being perfectly beautiful. (*Thomas Binney.*)

A mother's influence: The late Dr. Harvey Goodwin, Bishop of Carlisle, gave the following account of his mother: "I am one of those who lost their mother at a very early age. I was very little over six years old when my dear mother was suddenly taken from me. I mention my age that I may put before you the effect which my mother's teaching had upon me, and the tender age at which it ceased, and I think we may draw from it some useful lessons. Now, then, when I look back to the teaching of my mother, what do I think of it? I say deliberately, and without any amount of exaggeration, that though I have since that time been at school, been under tutors, been at college, and had all the experience of life, I do not believe that all the lessons that I have received since that time put together amount in value and in importance to the lessons which I learned from my mother before I was seven years old. I will tell you one of the first lessons she taught me. She taught me always to speak the truth; and the lesson she gave me concerning truth has never been lost upon me. She always brought me up in the feeling that what was to be spoken was to be the whole truth and nothing but the truth; that there was to be no evasion, that everything was to be stated simply and honestly, exactly as it occurred; and I will tell you how she enforced that lesson—she always spoke truth to me. I never caught her in any kind of deceit; I always knew that what she said to me she meant. I was always sure that if she told me she was going to do a thing she would do it, and no amount of coaxing or persuasion would lead her to change her mind. Absolute truth, absolute in the smallest matters, that was her practice, and that was the lesson that she impressed upon me."

Ver. 9. For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head.—*Filial love an ornament of beauty*:—It seems an instinct of humanity to put ornaments upon the person. It does not rank high among the exercises of the human faculties, yet it is quite above the reach of all inferior creatures. Ornaments on the fallen, like many other innocent things, become the occasions of sin, but they are not in their own nature evil. To deck with external beauty that which is morally corrupt within is a cheat which men practise on themselves and others, but adornment of the person, modest in measure and adopted instinctively by an innate sense of propriety, is conducive to virtue and consistent with Scripture. Moral qualities are the true adornments of a human being. All the graces of the Spirit are lovely: but here the foremost of relative duties, a child's reverential regard for a parent, is recommended as an ornament of surpassing beauty. Love, obey, cherish, reverence your parents. This is in God's sight of great price. These ornaments will not be out of date when time has run its course. The moral laws of God have avenging sanctions even in the powers of nature. Godliness is profitable unto all things. The first commandment is fruitful even in this life, and the second is like it—like it in its holy character, like it in its glad results. "Honour thy father and thy mother," this is an ornament of solid gold. Unlike the watering of superficial

accomplishments, the more rudely it is rubbed the more brightly it glows. (*William Arnot, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-19. My son, if sinners entice thee.—Reasons for resisting the enticements of sinners:—By sinners is meant all persons who are not true Christians. Three reasons why we should not consent when sinners entice us: 1. Because when we begin to sin it is hard to stop. 2. Because it is dangerous. 3. Because it is disgraceful. (1) It is so in the looks it gives us. (2) It is so in the company into which it brings us. Two things we ought to do: 1. Get rid of the sins we have committed. 2. Try to keep from sinning any more. Said a boy to his sister one day, "I want the spirit to look sin right in the face when it comes to me, and say, 'Begone.'" "Yes," replied the sister, "and one thing more you want; you want God's spectacles to see sin and know it when it comes, for it does not always show its colours." (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

Sinful enticements:—How industrious wicked people are to seduce others into the paths of the destroyer. Sinners love company in sin; the angels that fell were tempters almost as soon as they were sinners. They do not threaten or argue, but entice with flattery and fair speech; with a bait they draw the unwary young man to the hook. But they mistake if they think that by bringing others to partake with them in their guilt, and to be bound, as it were, in the bond with them, they shall have the less to pay themselves, for they will have so much the more to answer for. (*Matthew Henry.*)

The various ways by which sinners entice us to vice:—I. I SHALL MENTION SOME OF THE VARIOUS WAYS BY WHICH SINNERS ENTICE US TO VICE. 1. They represent it as a light and trivial matter, and at the worst as venial and pardonable. "What is it," they will probably say, "but a human weakness and infirmity, to which all men are subject? Can it be criminal to follow the dictates of one's natural passions? You can be no worse than thousands who indulge in the same excesses." They will give soft names to the greatest abominations in order to prevent alarm. In this way the understanding is imposed upon and the conscience is silenced. When vice is painted in all its black colours we are apt to be alarmed at the commission of it, but when it is stripped of its deformity we become more reconciled to it, and more readily yield. But can that be a light matter which is treason against the Almighty and which has subjected us to death? Perhaps we are more in danger from smaller than greater transgressions, because they steal upon us more imperceptibly, and draw us insensibly into the commission of them. Is not this a good argument to be jealous of the very appearance of evil and to loathe the garments spotted with iniquity? 2. By representing the gain and the pleasure which accompany it. Gain and pleasure are the two great charmers which have seduced mankind and led them captive at their will. What foul and black crimes hath the love of money been the means of perpetrating! To this corrupt source may be traced all the fraud and injustice, all the theft and robbery which have been committed. And what is the acquisition of wealth, upon which men are so much set? Is it any substantial, permanent good? Will it preserve health, prolong life, or ward off death? The love of pleasure has ruined many. It enchants the simple. Health has been impaired. 3. By traducing the principles of good men and turning their manners into ridicule. The gospel hath unfolded a glorious plan of salvation by which God, consistently with the purity of His nature and the perfection of His government, can be reconciled to the chief of sinners. It is nobly adapted to restore peace to the troubled mind and to inspire the hope of immortality. Shall we be laughed out of it by any set of men or for any gratification whatever? 4. By leading the road and calling us to follow them. It must be allowed that example has a powerful influence upon mankind and will often prevail when all other means prove ineffectual. Good-nature may not allow him to separate from his companions. To do as others do hath long been a powerful principle of action, and hath carried men greater lengths than they ever thought of. Before I proceed to the second branch of the subject I shall give an advice or two to the young. 1. Cultivate an early acquaintance with God. 2. Carefully avoid the company of the ungodly. Who knows but your principles may be shaken and your morals corrupted before you are aware? 3. Be earnest in prayer to God that He may never suffer you to be tempted beyond what you are able to bear. Heaven is your best resource, and from whence your most effectual aids do come. II. A FEW ARGUMENTS WHICH, BY THE BLESSING OF GOD, WILL ENABLE US TO RESIST THEM. 1. It is mean and dishonourable to be connected with bad men. 2. It is the most prejudicial to your best and eternal interests. The health will be impaired, the

soul lost. 3. The infinite obligations you are under to your God and Redeemer. 4. If you consent you will lay a foundation for much anguish and remorse. Loose and dissipated men may put on what appearance of gaiety and mirth they please, but I am apt to think it is more affected than real, more feigned than true. 5. The distress and grief in which you must involve your parents and friends. (*D. Johnstone, D.D.*) *The allurements of sin*.—I. A DANGER IMPLIED. It is the nature of sin to be aggressive. Wherever it obtains an entrance it will, if not destroyed, ultimately become the master. It cannot exist without seeking to push itself forward to some new conquest. There was never one transgressor yet who did not try to make another like himself. There is on earth what may be called a huge propaganda of evil. Self-security only makes more easy victims. II. A METHOD EXPOSED. The word "entice" implies that they do not ask you plainly and directly to commit sin as sin, but rather set before you some real or imaginary pleasure which you can get only by a commission of that which is sin. They dexterously conceal the fact that it is sin. They bait their hook. The sin is to be committed as a means to an end, and the mind is so occupied by the end that the guilt of the means is overlooked. Then it is well to know the enticements which are commonly employed to delude and allure the unwary. 1. One common enticement is the increase of knowledge. The assertion is made that they will "see life." 2. Another is pleasure. That may be good, but it is well to ask, "What will it cost?" It is dear if it can only be bought by the forfeiture of peace of conscience and the favour of God. 3. Another is the love of liberty. You are asked to do the doubtful or the wrong "just to assert your liberty." 4. The tempter promises that you will never be discovered. It is urged, "Nobody will ever know." Yes, God will know. III. RESISTANCE ENFORCED. "Consent thou not." Give a plain, downright, emphatic refusal. The right use of the word "No" at the critical turning-points of life will save a man from destruction. There are two excellent maxims as regards our moral actions—1. Always force yourselves to come to a positive decision in all matters of conduct. 2. Never allow yourselves to deliberate on a matter in reference to which conscience is clear. IV. A MOTIVE SUGGESTED. In this resistance which has been urged. The text is a parental appeal, and brings to bear upon us all the memories and associations of our earliest home. Cherish them, and they will build for you a breakwater within reach, by means of which you may safely override the fiercest storms and whirlwinds of temptation. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Bad company*.—The desire to make proselytes to our speculative opinions, and bring over others to think as we do, is not a more constant attendant on our pride and conceit than the desire in men of vicious lives to make the practice of others as bad as their own. Whether it be that many kinds of wickedness require numbers to associate, in order to their being carried on with success, so that they who are engaged in them are constantly beating up for allies; whether the sense of shame is not lessened, and the censure of the decent portion of mankind made more tolerable when multitudes share in it; whether the conscience is not, also, soothed and flattered from the same cause; or whether, lastly, the perversion of their ways has produced in such men a gratuitous desire of doing hurt, and a love of mischief for its own sake; so it is—the loss of his own virtue produces in a man the desire to overcome the virtue of others. The particular sin which the preacher had in his thoughts at the time was that of dishonesty, and the enticement he speaks of was to the taking of property belonging to others, and living upon it, instead of labouring for an honourable and independent livelihood. He selects that species of crime, out of many that would have answered as well, as a specimen whereby to illustrate his argument, and show the ruin and misery to which the path of sin conducts a man. There is one property, common to the language of all enticers of others to sin, of whatever kind the sin be; and Solomon has not failed to notice it in the case he has supposed. It is the pretence of the most disinterested friendship, high professions of good-will and regard for the person they undertake to entice. "Come with us; cast thy lot among us; let us all have one purse." They who entice them to the sin disguise their secret ends, their abominable selfishness, so successfully, under appearance of generosity, that they are blinded for a time, and think the morality which they have learned at home too strict and impracticable, and the kindness they received from their parents and relations hardly worthy to be compared to the friendship of these men. How, then, is a man to judge in this matter? Is he to pass through life with a sour suspicion of mankind, reject all their kindness as a cloak for bad designs, and hold the opinion that no man is ever

loved save by his father and mother? Far from it. In the passage before us he propounds a test and criterion whereby a young person may distinguish between true and false friendship; and it is this: that the true will always be accompanied with a concern for his virtue. "If sinners entice thee, consent thou not." I know not how I can better illustrate this maxim of Solomon than by stating, in the royal author's own words, the consequences of listening to the counsels of the ungodly—the solicitations to sin, with which the young are sure to be assailed by cunning and practised offenders. For example, with respect to sins of licentiousness, and the temptations thereto, he says of him that yieldeth to them that he that goeth after the strange woman, "goeth as an ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life." "For," he says again, "she hath cast down many wounded, yea, many strong men have been slain by her." Again, when he would dissuade from idleness, and inculcate the wisdom of a provident regard to the future, he says, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." Again, of dishonesty. "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness; but every one that is hasty, only to want. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity, tossed to and fro, of them that seek death." "The robbery of the wicked shall destroy them." (*A. Gibson, M.A.*)

The personal element in temptation:—Sin is not so dangerous as is the sinner. Sin is repellent; but the sinner may be winsome and attractive. The personal element in temptation is often the attractive element. I. SIN SOMETIMES CLOTHES ITSELF WITH PERSONAL AUTHORITY. As of a master over a servant, or a father over a son. Temptation becomes strong when it enlists authority on its behalf. II. SIN SOMETIMES CLOTHES ITSELF WITH PERSONAL AFFECTION. Many of the forms of vice depend entirely upon friendship for their propagation. They would die a natural death if it were not for a man's friends. III. SIN SOMETIMES CLOTHES ITSELF WITH PERSONAL ATTRACTIONS. Consider mental attractions. The learned, the witty, the intellectual bad man, is a power for evil. There is a passing over of power from the man to his sin. The more attractions a man has personally the more ropes has sin to pull upon others with, and the more deceptive attire has sin to clothe itself with. IV. SIN SOMETIMES CLOTHES ITSELF WITH PERSONAL INFLUENCE. Wealth gives a man influence in a community. So does social or official position. Young men should be taught to recognise sin promptly, no matter what it is clothed in. Christian manliness and independence are the safeguards against the personal elements in temptation. Dare to be right, even if sin should enlist all the powers of the world on its side. Dare to say, "No." This is Christian heroism. (*The Southern Pulpit.*)

Youth counselled:—The text refers to another state of society than that in which we live. I. LIFE IS A SCENE OF REAL AND DAILY TEMPTATION. Whether a man wishes it or not, he will be enticed. The mistake of many is that they expect to pass through life without being tried. They are not forearmed. There is not any perfect escape to be expected. It is the necessary discipline through which man must pass. The knowledge and experience of evil is just as inevitable as the knowledge and experience of any of the ordinary affairs of human life. II. THERE IS ONE PERIOD OF LIFE MORE SPECIALLY EXPOSED TO TEMPTATION THAN OTHERS. At first sight the temptations of youth seem to be at variance with the general principle, that as a man's day is so shall his strength be. Youth's strength and youth's day often seem to be very disproportionate. It seems hard that youth should be so severely tried. 1. The generosity of youth is tried by the callousness and coldness of the world. 2. The guilelessness of youth is tried by severe lessons; friends fall off, and depart like swallows in the winter, when we seem to need them most. 3. The purity of youth is tried by having to go forth into the world of real and actual impurity, to make venture in its own strength against it all. III. IN SOCIETY WE FIND MANY PERSONS WHOSE CHIEF DELIGHT IT SEEMS TO BE TO THROW TEMPTATIONS IN THE WAY OF YOUTH. No sooner does a man go astray than he strives to drag others with him. It is done—1. By ridicule. 2. By sly suggestions. 3. By lending bad books and indulging in bad conversation. To overcome these temptations great decision of character is required. To get on in life requires the steady, unbroken bent of a strong will. There is no guarantee for real decision of character except in the fear of God. (*W. G. Barrett.*)

The dangers to which the young are exposed:—Youth is the most interesting and important period of our moral probation for eternity. In it the young begin to be freed from that parental authority and discipline which restrain them from the practice of vice. They were then called, in some measure, to think, to judge, and to act for themselves. Then the principles early

instilled into their minds are to be brought to the test of trial. I. YOUNG MEN MAY BE EXPOSED TO THE BANEFUL INFLUENCE OF BAD EXAMPLE, TO THE FORCE OF RIDICULE, AND TO THE POWER OF PERSUASION. II. THE YOUNG ARE ENTICED BY SETTING BEFORE THEM SPLENDID AND SEDUCTIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE RICHES AND ENJOYMENT WITH WHICH VICE IS ACCOMPANIED. III. THE YOUNG ARE ENTICED TO THE COMMISSION OF VICE BY CONCEALING ITS NATIVE DEFORMITY. Sedulously endeavouring to diminish impressions of the danger with which it is attended. IV. THE YOUNG ARE ENTICED BY MISREPRESENTATIONS OF THE DIVINE BEING AND RELATIONS. God's mercifulness is overpressed, and His justice and holiness are put out of sight. God will never let sin go unpunished. (*John Hunter.*) *The foe and the fight*.—I. THE DANGER. 1. The sinners that entice from within are the man's own thoughts and desires. There is quite an army of these sinners in a young man's breast. Thoughts open up the way, and prepare a trodden path on which the man may follow. A gossamer thread is attached to an arrow and shot through the air unseen, over an impassable chasm. Fixed on the other side, it is sufficient to draw over a cord; the cord draws over a rope, the rope draws over a bridge, by which a highway is opened for all comers. Thus is the gulf passed that lies between the goodly character of a youth fresh from his father's family and the daring heights of iniquity on which veteran libertines stand. From the brink on this side the youth darts over a thought which makes itself fast to something on these forbidden regions. Deeds will quickly follow when the way is prepared. 2. The sinners that entice from without are fellow-men, who, having gone astray themselves, are busy leading others after them. The deed most characteristic that the father of lies ever did was to lead others after him into sin. An evil-doer has a craving for company in his wickedness. By a natural necessity, the licentious recruit among the ranks of the virtuous, the drunken among the ranks of the sober. It is a power of nature that is taken and employed to enslave men. Men are gregarious. The principle of association is implanted in their nature, and is mighty, according to the direction it gets, for good or evil. This great power generally becomes a ready agency of ill. II. THE ENTICEMENTS. These are manifold. As addressed to well-educated, well-conducted youths, they are always more or less disguised. The tempter always flings over at least his ugliest side some shred of an angel's garment. Few young men who have enjoyed a religious education come to a sudden stand, and at once turn their back upon God and godliness. Most of those who do fall diverge at first by imperceptible degrees from the path of righteousness. The importance of the ancient rule, "*Obsta principii*" ("resist the beginnings"), can never be overrated. Watch the beginnings of evil. High in the list of dangerous enticements stands the theatre. The custom of society encouraging the use of intoxicating drinks constitutes one of the most formidable dangers to youth in the present day. But we never yet met with a drunkard who either became one all at once or who designed to become one. In every case the dreadful demon vice has crept over the faculties by slow degrees, and at last surprised the victim. III. THE DEFENCE. "Consent thou not." It is a blunt, peremptory command. Your method of defence must differ from the adversary's mode of attack. His strength lies in making gradual approaches; yours is a resistance, sudden, resolute, total. It is not by partial compliances and polite excuses that enticements are to be repelled. With such adversaries you are not obliged to keep terms. Much depends on the unfaltering, undiluted, dignified "No" of one who fears God more than the sneer of fools. The shortest answer is the best. The means of resisting may be found in—1. Refinement of manners. 2. Profitable study. 3. Benevolent effort. 4. Improving company. But though the society of the good is an instrument of protection not to be despised, it is still subordinate. There is another companion. "There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." You cannot fight the enticements of sinful pleasure in your own strength. Under the Captain of salvation you may fight and win. (*William Arnot, D.D.*) *Men each other's tempters*.—There are two worlds from which temptation reaches us—the world in which we live, and the world below us. There are two classes of beings who act as tempters, devils and men. There is, however, but one class of characters; sinners alone can be tempters. We do not know how the first sin originated. I. LOOK AT THE CASE SUPPOSED. 1. It is a common case. Sinners do entice. It is in the nature of sin to make men tempters one of another. The social character of mankind seems to involve this. 2. It is a serious case. Generally speaking, the tempters are stronger than the tempted. The tendencies of our human nature are in the direction of transgression. The principles of every sin

are latent in us all. Those principles may be undeveloped because they have not been appealed to; but let an appeal be made, and they will be manifest. Temptation is presented to a nature more or less susceptible. 3. It is by no means a hopeless case. There is One who can be a refuge, a strength, and a present helper. II. LOOK AT THE ADVICE GIVEN. "Consent thou not." Without consent the temptation cannot take effect, and without consent the temptation can do no real harm. If you do consent, be sure "your sin will find you out." To consent now is to expose yourself to greater danger hereafter. If you consent to enticement to-day, it will be almost an impossible thing to refuse to-morrow. (*S. Martin.*) *Enticements and enticers*:—Some point is gained by regarding this as Solomon's advice to his son Rehoboam, who probably was an only son, and certainly was brought up amidst the dangerous luxuries and flatteries of Eastern court life. One of his chief perils lay in evil companionships. The surface of society never tells the truth concerning it. It is strange to find Rehoboam warned of "wild banditti" (vers. 11-14). Illustrate from the "Prince Hal" of English history and common sentiment concerning such men as "Robin Hood." Drinking, gambling, and impurity are the wild evils of our time, and the caution of the text applies to them. I. TEMPTATIONS MUST COME. This is a necessary law for those who are placed on probation. Forms of enticement differ in different ages. In each age, in each setting of social circumstances, there is a lawless, self-indulgent side. There is in all young people a love of romance, and a high-spiritedness, which makes them delight in adventure; but selfishness and covetousness are the dispositions which most readily respond to enticements of social evil. None can hope to escape temptation, none should wish to escape it. There is no possible culture of moral character without such testing. II. SIN LIES IN CONSENTING TO ENTICEMENTS. Personal consent is essential to sin. What advice can then be given to the young? 1. Do not put yourself in the way of temptation. 2. Meet enticement with simple refusal. III. THE CHARACTER OF AN ENTICEMENT IS SHOWN IN THE CHARACTER OF THOSE WHO PRESENT IT. We are often placed in difficulty by the disguises of temptation. Especially before we have gained life-experience. By the hands and the neck it does seem like Esau. By the talk it does seem a wise serpent. A fair judgment of it is often beyond our power. But judging those who offer the temptation is always possible. If a man is not a good man, you had better suspect what he wants you to do. If you know a man is good, you may begin with confidence in his advice. If sinners entice, it is always safe not to consent. If the good invite, it is always best to consent at once. God is the infinitely good One, and to His call and invitation instant and unquestioning response should be given. (*Weekly Pulpit.*) *Virtuous obstinacy*:—I. THE TEMPTERS ARE CALLED SINNERS. A sinner here is one who has himself gone out of the straight path of duty, and is now a wilful wanderer, aiming to draw others into his own dangerous course. II. THE WAY OF TEMPTING CALLED ENTICING. Sometimes the enticement of flattery is employed; sometimes misrepresentation; sometimes allurements; sometimes the barest artifice. The most dangerous artifices are those that tend to shake the only sure foundations of moral obligation and responsibility. III. HOW ARE THESE TEMPTERS TO BE DEALT WITH? Parental authority and affection enforce the solemn charge. Call in reason to your aid. Call in reflection. Call in self-knowledge. Call in the solemn warnings of God's holy oracles. Call in watchfulness and prayer. Covet the approbation of conscience. Stop to count the final cost. Let the sensual allure, let the unbelieving misrepresent, let the reckless scoff; but by the help of God, in the name of all that is virtuous and praiseworthy, for the happiness of your whole present life, in the aspiration after a life of perfect virtue and of perfect bliss, let your one decisive answer ever be, "No." (*J. Bullar.*) *The enticements of sinners*:—Youth, neglected or corrupted, makes manhood despicable or vicious. The crimes of ripper years multiply and embitter the infirmities and the sorrows of age. "Beware of poisoning the youthful mind with false principles. Leave the rational powers gradually to unfold themselves. You may aid reason in its operations, but never let authority supply the place of conviction, nor check a passion, but by an argument level to the comprehension." This is the pernicious doctrine of the new philosophy, which is but another name for infidelity. Better advice is, watch the first dawnings of intellect. It begins to open sooner than most suspect. Its natural tendency is towards error. It belongs to you to inform and to direct it. Watch, with equal care, the first emotions of feeling and passion; their tendency is equally towards vice. Tell your children that virtue derives its chief and its only religious value from its conformity to the nature and will of God, and that vice is odious and detestable from its opposition to

both. I. IS IT NOT STRANGE THE WICKED SHOULD SEEK TO ENTICE OTHERS? That human nature is corrupted appears in the practice and the contagion of vice. Vice, the natural product of a tainted heart, first makes its appearance in the moral constitution; grows by indulgence, and is propagated by example. 1. Sinners are prompted to the seduction of others by natural impulse. It results both from their principles and their habits. 2. The wicked are led to seduction by a second motive. They feel a shame which they refuse to acknowledge; they are anxious to wear off this painful impression in their own minds, and divide the disgrace of their conduct in the opinion of mankind by the society of others. 3. Vice is also attended with fear. The man wants society in order to dissipate thought. 4. Vice, indeed, requires society either for its full enjoyment or the effectual accomplishment of its purposes. 5. Indefatigable is the kingdom of darkness in propagating itself. 6. Infernal influences may be necessary to account for the activity of the wicked in seduction. II. THE METHODS EMPLOYED IN THE WORK OF SEDUCTION. The efforts of the seducer are not systematic and uniform. They are accommodated to circumstances and tempers. You are not guiltless if you suffer yourselves to be seduced. No temptation amounts to a physical necessity of transgressing; neither sin nor sinners can prevail against you without your own inclination. Your most effectual weapon of defence is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, in connection with the other parts of the Christian armour. (*David Birchan, D.L.*)

Bad company.—I. THE COMPANY PORTRAYED. 1. Lawlessness. "Sinners" (ver. 10; 1 John iii. 4). To sin is to sink. 2. Persuasiveness. "Entice thee." The gilded trappings of many modern amusements, the gay apparel of fallen virtue, the promise of good to be enjoyed that never comes, are baits by which thousands are lured into sin. 3. Combination. "Come with us" (ver. 11). "Combine," said a great politician, when speaking to a class of men who had a grievance which they wished to redress. So says the enemy of souls. In the ranks of the wicked hand joins in hand (chap. xi. 21). 4. Cruelty. "Let us lay wait for blood." 5. Cowardice. "Let us lay wait." Cruelty and cowardice are often allied. 6. Selfishness (ver. 13). The emptying of other people's houses is of no consequence so that they fill their own. It is said of Napoleon, that for every step he rose in greatness the head of another fell. 7. Sociability (ver. 14). This sounds pleasant enough; but what of the money to be put into the purse? Blood-money. 8. Activity (ver. 16). There is in the wicked an impulse which impels them to hurry into sin. II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN. 1. Heed good advice (ver. 8). The voice of the tempter is powerless to him who listens reverently to the voice of God (Mark i. 11, 26). 2. Learn to say, "No" (ver. 10). 3. Shun evil company (ver. 15). "Evil companions," says one, "first make us sad, and then they make us bad." 4. Keep away from the haunts of evil. "Refrain thy foot." Some who would not associate with the ungodly frequent the places where the wicked congregate. They go to see, and in some cases as the result of seeing, "fall to rise no more." The Swiss mules have a habit of going close to the edge of dangerous precipices. If men were as sure-footed in the path of life as are mules upon the mountains, they might do so too; but with natures prone to evil, it is safer to keep as far as possible from the place where danger is. 5. Cultivate true godliness. A godly character is a wall of defence which the worldly are often afraid to attack. (*H. Thorne.*)

Warning against the enticements of the wicked.—I. THE EVIL ENTICEMENT MENTIONED in the text. 1. The wicked deed, it is promised, shall be done in secrecy and with concealment. 2. It is a bold and spirited act to which the young man is incited. The appeal is made to his "pluck" and love of adventure (ver. 12). 3. The allure-ment is held out of great spoil. 4. The offer of frank and jovial companionship. II. THE DISSUASIVE WARNING OF THE TEXT (ver. 10). 1. Consider the awful extremes to which your evil course may lead. 2. Consider how faithfully and plainly you have been warned. 3. The ruinous consequences of a wicked course. (*T. G. Horton.*)

Admonition to the young.—I. WHO THEY ARE AGAINST WHOSE ENTICEMENTS THE YOUNG ARE TO BE ON THEIR GUARD. 1. Such as have abandoned themselves to vice and crime. The gratification of devils is to have men as sinful and miserable as they are. 2. Those who, however moral in the eye of men, are yet destitute of godliness. It has always been the policy of the enemy of souls to lead men into the depths of iniquity by little and little. The drunkard, for example, is as sober, enlightened, industrious, respected in society, beloved in his own family as any other when Satan first approaches him. Now, were the destroyer of man at once to show to this individual the full picture of that beastliness and misery to which he intended soon to reduce him, there would still be a sufficiency of moral courage, of self-preservation,

of human feeling in him to cause him to flee even with horror and with tears from the snare. But Satan is too cunning and too intent upon success. He has patience in mischief, and can exercise it long in order to gain a mighty end. 3. Those especially who are acquaintances or companions. The companionship of the young is usually formed by accidental circumstances, without thought or discrimination. Some become companions at school, some by neighbourhood, some by relationship, some by serving under the same master, or working in the same establishment. 4. Those also who are strangers. Alas! such is the moral condition of man that we must live in this world in a state of constant suspicion. It was by listening to a stranger that our first mother was deceived; and in the same way was the man of God, who had been sent from Judah to denounce the wrath of Jehovah against Jeroboam and his idolatrous altar at Bethel, betrayed into an act of fatal disobedience. II. THE NATURE OF THE ENTICEMENTS AGAINST WHICH THE YOUNG ARE HERE WARNED. 1. Sinners will entice them by their example. 2. Sinners will entice them by holding out false hopes and representations of enjoyment in the courses to which they allure them. 3. By misrepresenting or denying the truth of God. 4. By ridiculing their moral fears. 5. By appealing to the multitudes. We naturally hate singularity, and in nothing so much as in religion. 6. By flattering kindness and attention. 7. By pretensions to religion. III. ILLUSTRATE AND ENFORCE THE ADMONITION, "CONSENT THOU NOT." 1. It is only with their own consent that the young can be led astray. The guilt as well as the bitter consequences of their yielding to sin will rest with themselves. 2. To be ready to refuse their consent to the enticements of sinners, their hearts must be well established in regard to both the ways of sin and the ways of righteousness. 3. The young are to cherish in their minds a suspicion and terror of all who would entice them to sin. 4. Let them carry about with them habitually a fear of God and a sense of His presence. 5. Let them consider the extreme difficulty of entering into life. Instead of tampering with sin, and exposing ourselves to its snares, we would have enough ado to gain heaven though no such allurements lay in our path. 6. Let them ponder much and deeply the misery of those who are pursuing the pleasures of sin. 7. Let them keep steadily before their minds the terrors of the wrath that is to come. 8. Let them now give their consent to the invitations of Christ. (*Joseph Hay, M.A.*) *Counsel for the tempted* :—I. TEMPTATION IS INEVITABLE. 1. The name of temptation is legion, for they are many, and yet one. The strongest agencies appear in human form—sinners, who are agents of the devil. They may be our companions. They may even call themselves our friends. 2. It is not a sin to be tempted. II. THE POWER OF TEMPTATION. Its power lies in the word "entice." Enticements are the bait on the devil's hook. "Pleasure" is one of them. "Seeing life" is another. The love of liberty or of asserting independence is a powerful lure. The dread of being laughed at is a strong compulsion. "Nobody will know" is often the last inducement which subdues the will and silences the conscience. III. THE LIMITS OF TEMPTATION. Temptation is mighty, but it is not almighty. No one has power over our will so that we must yield. IV. THE WAY OF ESCAPE. "Consent thou not." Augustine traced the ways of the battle. They are "*Cogitatio, Imaginatio, Delectatio, Consensio.*" Consent is the final stage of a lost battle. It is the lowering of the flag before the enemy; the opening of the gates of the citadel of life. V. SAY "NO" TO THE TEMPTER, BUT SAY "YES" TO CHRIST. He says, "Lo, I am with you alway"; "I have prayed for you that your faith fail not"; "Take therefore the whole armour of God," &c. (*John Reid, M.A.*) *A courageous decision* :—In America there were some eight young men who went out one Sabbath morning along the banks of the Potomac, and they were breaking the Sabbath and acting in a most outrageous way, when the bell of the village church rang out, and one of the young men stopped short and said, "I must go to church." The others said, "What d'ye mean? You're surely not going to church?" "Yes, I am going." "Oh, George is getting pious, and so he ought to be baptized, and here we are by the Potomac River, and we will baptize him by immersion." And so they were about to plunge him in the river, when he said, "Stop one minute, boys, and then I'm in your hands; but before you plunge me into the river, I want to tell you one thing. My mother was an invalid, and I never saw her out of bed, and when I was about to leave home and choose an occupation, she said to me, 'Now, George, after you are all ready to go, I want to see you in my room, and to give you my dying blessing, for I am certain I shall never see you again. Your father has not money enough to bring you home at the holidays, and I am very certain before you return I shall have left you for ever, so

be sure and come.' I went into my mother's room after I was ready, and she asked me if I would kneel down by the bedside, and I knelt down. I remember just how her hand looked. I remember the blue vein on the thin wasted hand as she put it out over me. Then she dropped it upon my head and said, 'This is my benediction. I will never see you again, and I want you to remember this: you will be out in the world, and there will be a great many temptations over you; but remember when sinners entice thee consent thou not.' Now," said he, "I am going to church." "Well," they said, "you mustn't go to church." He started; they followed, half in derision, half in earnestness. They came to the church door. They went in. That day the gospel was mighty in the heart of that young man. Then and there he yielded himself to God. Before many months had passed along, some from one kind of influence, some from another, but all those young men, had entered the kingdom of Christ. Six of them are in heaven, two of them are occupying high positions in the Church, and all because that young man dared to do his duty. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Let us lay wait for blood.—*The robber of Solomon's time* :—The temptation against which the teacher seeks to guard his disciple is that of joining a band of highway robbers. At no period in its history has Palestine ever risen to the security of a well-ordered police system, and the wild license of the marauder's life attracted, we may well believe, many who were brought up in towns. The "vain men" who gathered round Jephthah (Judges xi. 3), the lawless or discontented who came to David in Adullam (1 Sam. xxii. 2), the bands of robbers who infested every part of the country in the period of the New Testament, and against whom every Roman governor had to wage incessant war, show how deeply rooted the evil was there. The story of St. John and the young convert who became a robber, the most interesting of all apostolic traditions, may serve as another illustration. The history of many centuries (our own, *e.g.*, in the popular traditions of Robin Hood and of Henry V.), presents like phenomena. The robber-life has attractions for the open-hearted and adventurous. No generation, perhaps no class, can afford to despise the warning against it. (*Dean Plumptre.*)

The robber's speech :—I. YOUNG MEN ARE IN GREAT DANGER OF BEING DRAWN AWAY TO SINFUL COURSES. Because they have not that grounded experience that others have, nor are so able to look through shows into substances. Because they are wilful and headstrong, and will follow their own lusts, notwithstanding good men's persuasions.

II. SECRECY IS A GREAT BAIT TO WICKEDNESS. Because shame is a great bridle to keep men from open wickedness. Many are kept in by it whom no counsel will keep from evil ways. Because fear of punishment is a bit that keeps others from sin. Take heed of secret solicitations to secret evils.

III. WICKED MEN HAVE MANY SECRET DEVICES TO BRING THEIR WICKED DESIGNS TO PASS. As Esau (Gen. xxvii. 41), Jezebel (1 Kings xxi. 9). It is their study day and night (Psa. xxxvi. 4; Prov. iv. 16).

IV. WICKED MEN PROMISE THEMSELVES SUCCESS OF THEIR MISCHIEVOUS PLOTS. They think their mine too deep for men to countermine, and look not to God, who can go beyond them. This shows us how deeply sin is rooted in sinful souls, so that they dare promise themselves good success, not only in lawful, but also in sinful affairs. (*Francis Taylor.*)

My son, walk not thou in the way with them.—*Bad company* :—Hardly any young man goes to a place of dissipation alone. Each one is accompanied. No man goes to ruin alone. He always takes some one else with him. We may, in our places of business, be compelled to talk to and mingle with bad men; but he who deliberately chooses to associate with vicious people is engaged in carrying on a courtship with a Delilah, whose shears will clip off all the locks of his strength, and he will be tripped into perdition.

1. I warn you to shun the sceptic—the young man who puts his fingers in his vest and laughs at your old-fashioned religion, and turns over to some mystery of the Bible and says, "Explain that, my pious friend—explain that"; and who says, "Nobody shall scare me; I am not afraid of the future." Alas! a time will come when the blustering young infidel will have to die, and then his diamond ring will flash no splendour in the eyes of Death as the grim foe stands over the couch waiting for his soul.

2. Again, I urge you to shun the companionship of idlers. There are men hanging around every store, and office, and shop who have nothing to do, or act as if they had not. Idleness is next door to villainy. Thieves, gamblers, burglars, shop-lifters, and assassins are made from the class who have nothing to do.

3. I urge you to avoid the perpetual pleasure-seeker. Look out for the man who always plays and never works. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Dissuasion from joining the robbers :—The sum of all this advice is as if he had said, "Oh, my son, sinners will entice thee with these or such like words and promises, and lay such snares for thy inexperienced

youth ; but remember that thou art my son, and not theirs, and therefore hast more reason to hearken to me, who speak to thee out of a fatherly affection. Hearken not, therefore, to their counsels, flatteries, or promises. Show thyself so strange to them that thou wilt not so much as enter into their way, much less walk into it."

I. CHILDREN SHOULD RATHER HEARKEN TO THEIR PARENTS' GOOD COUNSEL THAN TO OTHERS' BAD. Because they are more engaged to parents than to any other for life, education, pains, and means. Parents' counsels are given in love, and are for their good. **II. YOUNG MEN HAVE NEED TO LABOUR FOR KNOWLEDGE TO DISCERN BETWEEN GOOD COUNSEL AND BAD.** Because they are often put to it. Young men stand, as

Hercules in his dream, between virtue and vice, solicited by both. Because there are fair pretences for all sins. Gluttony is called the free use of the creature; drunkenness, good-fellowship; prodigality is called liberality; covetousness, thrift; lust is entitled love; pride goes for handsomeness. It needs a good touchstone to distinguish between gold and copper well gilt over. No less skill is needed to distinguish between real and apparent good. Weigh things by the light of reason and the light of Scripture. **III. ALLUREMENTS TO SIN ARE NO EXCUSE FOR SIN.** Because allurers have no power to compel. They may, and ought to be refused. **IV. COMPANY EXCUSES NO MAN IN HIS SINS.** Company cannot alter the nature of things. It cannot make good evil or evil good. There is choice of company; all company is not evil. Company may draw our corrupt nature to sin, but cannot excuse us for sin. **V. CONTINUANCE, OR WALKING IN SIN, IS DANGEROUS.** It is the sign of a hard heart to continue in sin. The mouth of the conscience is stopped. It makes the heart more hard still. Custom will make a man not start at the greatest sins. **VI. THE**

VERY ENTRANCE INTO SINFUL WAYS IS FULL OF DANGER, LIKE A DOWNFALL—no stay till you come to the bottom. Keep out of evil ways, or get out quickly. (*Francis Taylor.*) *The pernicious effects of evil company:*—The condition and circumstances in which we are placed here are such that society is necessary to the happiness, if not to the very being, of mankind. Besides this necessity, which compels us to seek assistance from society, there is a natural inclination which strongly prompts us to it. Solomon, having observed this absolute necessity of friendship and society, and of what high importance it is to choose friends and companions rightly, hath, in this Book of Proverbs, given many rules concerning that choice, of which the text is one. "Walk not in the way of sinners"; enter not into any friendship with wicked men. I shall show the dangers of evil, and the advantages of good, company.

1. As the foundation of all, let me mention, first, the authority of the Holy Scriptures, choosing a few out of the many passages to this purpose with which the sacred writings abound. "Make no friendship," saith Solomon, "with an angry man, lest thou learn his ways, and get a snare to thy soul. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." To this purpose the prophet expostulates very sharply with Jehoshaphat concerning the alliance into which he had entered with Ahab, a wicked and idolatrous king: "Shouldst thou love them that hate the Lord?" There is something very strong and solemn in the adjuration used by St. Paul to the Thessalonians: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly." 2. To this authority of Holy Scripture I add the confirmation of reason, to show that we ought to be careful in the choice of companions from this consideration, that the nature of a man's friends or company must be of great consequence to his well-being. And this appears from hence, because they always have an extraordinary influence, not only upon his own temper and behaviour, but upon all his chief concerns. Now, comfort in distress is one of the chief advantages that may be gained by friendship, and one of the principal ends proposed by it. But how can this be hoped for from any wicked person? However agreeable his temper may be to a mind at ease, however soothing his discourse to the ear of the prosperous, yet can it bring little comfort to a troubled spirit. Besides, the only support in adversity is religion, the firm belief of a wise and good Providence, directing all things to the best ends. And how is it possible for a man to administer comfort from this consideration who lives in rebellion against that great Being? or how can one who hath any love to religion delight in the company of him who disclaims or disregards it? Even our interest is injured by intimacy with wicked men; for being guided by their passions and sacrificing their most sacred obligations to their vices, they are inconstant and insincere, and likely to betray our interests who neglect and forfeit their own. Whereas, in conversing with the good man, there are many advantages. His known sincerity secures us from the anxiety of suspicion; the principles upon

which he acts remove all fears of change in him. Reputation, it is evident, cannot be obtained by living in familiarity with wicked men. Friendship either finds or makes men alike; and the world justly supposes that we resemble those with whom we live in strict intimacy. For this reason nothing can be of greater use to our character than a close union with wise and good men. From what hath been said may be drawn some observations worthy of our attention and care. 1. We should fix in our minds a right sense of the great use which may arise to us all from society and mutual converse. 2. All among us who may be considered in the different relations of parents or masters ought to be careful, not only for ourselves, but for those who are committed to our charge or dependent upon us, in the choice of companions. 3. We should labour to acquire those good qualities which are most proper to fit us for receiving and giving improvement by company. Such as candour and ingenuousness of mind, by which we are brought readily to acknowledge our own mistakes and to do justice to the perfections or pre-eminence of another. Such, likewise, is humility, a virtue which makes us inclined to listen and learn. We should also study to bring advantage to company, as well as receive from it; to which end we should establish a persuasion of our truth, honesty, and good-nature. (*J. Lawson.*)

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.—*A warning against evil associations:*—In things temporal the knowledge of peril leads naturally to the avoidance of it. The parallel of the text implies the existence of danger, under the simile of the spreading of the net, and develops the character of the safeguard, viz., consciousness of the purpose for which the net is spread. Three sources from which the dangers of young people specially arise: evil associations, false principles, and a perverse and wicked heart. The majority of young men in the world consist of the sceptical, who despise religion; the sensual, who hate it; and the indifferent, who neglect it. The sceptical or philosophical young man is one who has read much, but reasoned little. His philosophy consists in perplexing and unsettling what others believe rather than in propounding anything rational of his own. He affects a thorough contempt of the old tracks and beaten paths, and disclaims all views of religion that do not afford scope for human reason. There is a second class of tempters who leave the intellect untouched, but who do the work of the enemy, and spread nets for the soul by means of appetites and lusts. Its aim is to make the most of time as it passes, to drain the cup of pleasure while yet it remains within our grasp, to resolve the existence of man into the gratification of sense, and leave futurity, which must be, and eternity, which may be, to shift for themselves. There is yet a third class of evil associates or tempters, by whom snares are spread for the soul, who do not pride themselves on their sensuality, like the second, or on their infidelity, like the first, who literally “care for none of these things.” These are persons who consider religion as a thing decent and proper enough for those who have time to spare, such as children and servants, but account it only the occasional concern of men devoted to study or engaged in business. 1. The antidote for the subtle poison insinuated by the infidel is to be found in the just consideration of Christ’s atonement. 2. The antidote to the allurements of the sensual is the just consideration of Christ’s example. 3. The most effectual antidote to the stealthy and subtle poison of the companionship and example of the indifferent is the just appreciation of the promises of Christ. Until the infidel can observe the brightness of Christ’s glory; until the sensualist can sully the purity of Christ’s holiness; until the worldling can demonstrate the fallacy of Christ’s promises, safety may always be found by looking unto Jesus, by looking unto Him in our hours of need. (*Thomas Dale, M.A.*) *Persuasions and dissuasions:*—“In vain.” So our translation and some others read it. Some take it to be in vain in regard of the bird, which will take no warning, but will fly to the meat, though it fall into the net. So will thieves go on till they come to the gallows, notwithstanding examples of others hanged before, or counsels of friends. Others apply it to the young man himself, as if Solomon had said, “If birds have wit to see and avoid snares, thou, my son, being a reasonable creature, shouldst much more see the danger of these evil men’s counsels.”

I. VARIETY OF REASONS ARE NEEDFUL TO DISSUADE FROM EVIL. Because of our private unbelief; because of our positive unbelief; because of men’s different dispositions. **II. REASONS BROUGHT TO CONFIRM TRUTH MUST BE SOLID ONES.** Because nothing but truth should come from an informer (teacher). Reasons ought not only to be true, but to bear up all truths. How can a man think to persuade others by that which does not persuade himself? **III. THERE IS A WORLD OF INJUSTICE IN THE WORLD.** Men have different humours and affections. We must be just in the

midst of an unjust generation. IV. WICKED MEN HAVE CUNNING DEVICES TO DO MISCHIEF. To expedite the business the sooner, that they may quickly effect their desire, and to remove all impediments. Take heed of ungodly men's plots. Use the dove's innocency, but with the serpent's subtily. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Warned by seeing:—Early in the morning I went out with a fowler to catch wild pigeons. We hastened through the gorge of the mountain. We spread out our net, covering up the edges of the net, as well as we might, with the branches of trees, so that the fowls of the air might not discover it. We arranged the call-bird; its feet fast, its wings flapping, so as to invite all the fowls of the air to come and lie there. Then we retired into a booth of branches, and waited for the birds to come. In the far heights we saw a flock of birds approach. They came nearer and nearer, and lower and lower, until they were just able to drop into the net, when they suddenly darted away. We were disappointed. We waited, and after a while saw another flock of birds come nearer and nearer, and lower and lower, until just the moment when they were about to drop into the net, suddenly they darted away. I said to the old fowler, "What is the reason of this? Let us examine the thing." So we went out, and we found that, by the flutter of a tree-branch, part of the net had been exposed, so that the birds, coming near, had seen their danger and had escaped. And when I saw that, I said to the old fowler, "That reminds me of a passage of Scripture: 'Surely in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird.'" (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Traps for men:—There are two classes of temptations—the superficial and the subterranean—those aboveground, those underground. If a man could see sin as it is, he would no more embrace it than he would embrace a leper. I want to point out the insidious temptations that are assailing more especially our young men. The only kind of nature comparatively free from temptation, so far as I can judge, is the cold, hard, stingy, mean temperament. What would Satan do with such a man if he got him? Satan is not anxious to get a man who, after a while, may dispute with him the realm of everlasting meanness. It is the generous young man, the ardent young man, the warm-hearted young man, the social young man that is in especial peril. 1. The first class of temptations that assault a young man is led on by the sceptic. He will not admit he is an infidel or atheist. Oh, no! he is a "free-thinker"; he is one of your "liberal" men; he is free and easy in religion. 2. The second class of insidious temptations that come upon our young men is led on by the dishonest employer. 3. Temptations to drink. (*Ibid.*)

Moral traps:—I. SIN LAYS TRAPS FOR SOULS. Sin has woven a net and laid it along the path of life. This net is wrought of diverse materials, such as sensuality, avarice, ambition. Traps are adjusted for men of every mental type, of every period in life, in every social grade. II. THESE TRAPS MUST BE EXPOSED. The fowler conceals his net. Sin works insidiously. It takes advantage of men's circumstances, ignorance, and inexperience. The work of the true philanthropist is to expose the traps. III. THESE TRAPS BRING RUIN TO THEIR AUTHORS. They lay wait for their own blood. Retribution overtakes them. If they escape violence themselves, the Nemesis pursues them. Their schemes may seem to prosper here, but justice tracks their steps, and their ruin is inevitable. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain.—*Greed of gold*:—Midas, the Phrygian king, asked a favour of the gods, and they agreed to grant him whatever he should desire. The monarch, overjoyed, resolved to make the favour inexhaustible. He prayed that whatever he touched might be turned into gold. The prayer was granted, and bitter were the consequences. Whatever the poor king touched did turn to gold. He laid his hand upon a rock, and it became a huge mass of gold of priceless value; he clutched his oaken staff, and it became in his hand a bar of virgin gold. At first the monarch's joy was unbounded, and he returned to his palace the most favoured of mortals. Alas for the short-sightedness of man! He sat at table, and all he touched turned in mockery of his wish to gold—pure, solid gold. Then the conviction came rushing upon his humbled mind, that he must perish from his grasping wish—die in the midst of plenty; and remembering the ominous saying he had heard, "The gods themselves cannot take back their gifts," he howled to the sternly smiling Dionysius to restore him to the coarsest, vilest food, and deliver him from the curse of gold.

Vers. 20-23. *Wisdom crieth without.*—*The voice of true Wisdom*:—The Lord Jesus Christ is the true Wisdom which speaks to the sons of men. The ancients were accustomed to speak of their religion as wisdom or philosophy, and therefore

the Greeks represented Minerva as the goddess of wisdom, saying that she had proceeded from the brain of Jupiter. I. THE ATTITUDE WHICH WISDOM TAKES WHEN SHE ADDRESSES THE SONS OF MEN. 1. Her appeal is an open and public one. 2. Her proposals are of a varied description. She comes into the streets, where are all manner of enticing frivolities. In the chief places of concourse, where the multitudes assemble. In the opening of the gates, where commerce is carried on. 3. Her appeals are pathetic. She "crieth." II. THE CHARACTERS WHICH WISDOM ADDRESSES HERSELF TO. Simple ones; scorners; fools. III. THE PROMISES WHICH SHE MAKES. "I will infuse My Spirit into you." (*W. Barker.*) *The fatal policy of drift*:—I. THE MESSAGE. 1. Eastern method of publication. "She," beautiful personification of Wisdom, stands "at the head of the noisy streets" (*R.V. margin*). Our methods—the voice—the press, its powerful agency. 2. But the substance of wisdom is always the same, because human nature, life, and needs are the same. We still require higher guidance in our hurried life of to-day. Wisdom sees into the heart of things; seeks their essence; is not drawn aside by accidentals; and puts them in true proportions. 3. The Spirit of Wisdom. "I will pour out My Spirit," &c. More a spirit than a science: not to be learnt by rules, but reveals itself to love. Ruskin says that no great painting can be produced unless the artist loves his subject. There must be a leaning that way. A boy who leans to science will make a better naturalist than one to whom slugs and insects are repulsive. So the spirit of wisdom is poured out as love upon the lover. It purifies thought, steadies life, and enriches the nature. II. HOW TREATED. "I have called," &c. She stands and cries: but the stream passes by engrossed and heedless, or turns to break a jest upon her. "Simple ones," those who are as weather-vanes, light of head, and turned by every wind; shallow of heart, they live the easy life of hand to mouth. "Scorners," the superior people, who "know, don't you know," to whom earnestness is fanaticism, and devotion cant. "Fools," to whom knowledge is a reproach, who stupidly go on their way, and resent interference, even for their good. But the excuses! "Let my schemes come to completion, and then!" "When I have a bit more time!" If a youth neglects learning a trade or profession, his life will be "bound in shallows and miseries." To drift is fatal. But too often this counsel is set at naught. III. THE PUNISHMENT OF NEGLECT. All through the day she has cried, and has been neglected or despised. The light begins to fade, the night comes, not of "sleep, balmy sleep," but of wrath. Wisdom sadly leaves. The whirlwind begins to gather: the air trembles: the earth shudders. Most fearful of all is God's laughter through the darkened heavens. (*J. Feather.*) *The cry of Wisdom*:—Evil-doers are not left without a warning. The warning is loud, public, authoritative. The wisdom of God is a manifold wisdom. While it centres bodily in Christ, and thence issues as from its source, it is reflected and re-echoed from every object and every event. Every law of nature, and every event in history, has a tongue by which Wisdom proclaims God's holiness and rebukes man's sin. Wisdom speaks through man's conscience. It is not conscience proclaiming God's anger against the man's evil that has power to make the man good. It is the conscience sprinkled with the blood of Christ that at once speaks peace and works purity. I. REPROOF OF THE SIMPLE WHO LOVE SIMPLICITY. By the "simple" is meant that class of sinners whose leading characteristic is the absence of good rather than positive activity in evil. The root of bitterness has not shot forth in any form of outrageous vice, but it remains destitute of righteousness. The simple for time are always a numerous class; but the simple for eternity are a more numerous class still. II. REPROOF FOR THE SCORNERS WHO LOVE SCORNING. This class meet the threatening realities of eternity, not by an easy indifference, but by a hardy resistance. Scorners may be found on both the edges of society. Poverty and riches become by turns a temptation to the same sin. Scorners love scorning. The habit grows by indulgence. It becomes a second nature. It becomes the element in which they live. Their scoffs are generally parrying strokes to keep convictions away. These smart sayings are the fence to turn aside certain arrows which might otherwise fix their tormenting barbs in the conscience. The scorner is not so bold a man as he appears to be. III. REPROOF FOR THE FOOLS WHO HATE KNOWLEDGE. Fools are those who have reached the very highest degrees of evil. They hate knowledge, and knowledge has its beginning in the fear of God. The emphatic "no God" of the fourteenth Psalm indicates, not the despair of a seeker who is unable to find truth, but the anger of an enemy who does not like to retain it. It is not a judgment formed in the fool's understanding, but a passion rankling in his heart. (*William Arnot, D.D.*) *Wisdom's voice*:—

I. A DIVINE CALL. 1. The subject of the call. 2. The places in which it is given. 3. The manner in which it is addressed. 4. The persons to whom it is applied. (1) The simple are those who are easily seduced, the thoughtless masses, who become the ready victims of evil-designing men. (2) The scorers are those who ridicule sacred things. (3) The fools who hate knowledge include both of the above classes. II. AN IMPORTANT EXHORTATION—"Turn you at My reproof." 1. The subject to which this exhortation refers. The great design of the gospel is to turn men from the error of their way. (1) We are to turn in the exercise of true repentance. (2) We are to turn with full purpose of heart. (3) We are to turn without delay. 2. The inducement given in order to lead us to comply with this exhortation. The sinner's inability to turn to God is not of the same nature, as our inability to fly, which is a physical inability. To meet the moral inability, and to encourage those who are oppressed with a sense of it, the promise is given, "I will pour out My Spirit unto you." He is bestowed in order to change our hearts, to aid our infirmities, and to strengthen us with strength in our souls. It is also said, "I will make known My words unto you." (1) They will be made known to enlighten. (2) To direct. (3) To quicken. (4) To console. III. A SOLEMN DENUNCIATION. Of the doom here denounced we have—1. Its procuring cause. The disregard shown for, and the contempt cast upon, the Divine message. The act "stretching out the hand" is done—(1) To command attention. (2) To afford assistance. (3) To confer a blessing. (4) To make up a quarrel. 2. Its terrible nature. He who is shown as graciously promising and helping is now described as "laughing at calamity and mocking at fears." And the woe will be aggravated by the consideration that mercy will be sought when seeking it will be unavailing. (*Author of "Footsteps of Jesus."*) *Wisdom's warning*:—The Book of Proverbs is a jewel-case well filled with gems. This passage is a delightfully Oriental presentation of the truth of the call of God to the soul of man. I. THE CALL OF WISDOM. 1. By wisdom is meant the beneficent Divine energy. 2. This Divine energy comes into connection with man, and produces a reflection of itself in him. 3. The complete presentation of this Divine wisdom going forth for the enlightenment of men is found in Jesus Christ. (1) This call is open. (2) The offer made in the call is free. (3) All classes of men are touched by this call. (4) The call is urgent. II. THE RESULTS OF THE CALL OF WISDOM. 1. Refusal of God's offer is possible, and consequences necessarily follow. (1) The acceptance of sin puts man in the attitude of the rejection of God. (2) When sinful man wants God's wisdom as a refuge it is no longer available. (3) Calamity comes upon those who reject the voice of the wisdom of God. (4) The retribution that comes is largely internal. 2. It is possible for men to hear and obey Wisdom's voice. The result to the obedient is given thus. (1) Part of it is safety. (2) Out of this comes quietude. This lesson has its full application in relation to Wisdom incarnate, even the Lord Jesus Christ. There are diverse consequences for those who answer this voice diversely. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Heavenly wisdom*:—The Hebrew has "wisdoms" plural, as including all kinds of true wisdom. I. HEAVENLY WISDOM IS WORTH THE LOOKING AFTER. As things published and proclaimed are worth taking notice of. II. THIS HEAVENLY WISDOM IS TO BE FOUND ONLY IN JESUS CHRIST. As the Son of God He knew the Father's will from all eternity. God spake to Him before His incarnation. God gave Him the Spirit beyond measure. All wisdom that others have in heavenly things comes from Him. III. GOD IS VERY DESIRIOUS THAT MEN SHOULD GET HEAVENLY WISDOM. Therefore He cries loudly, earnestly, affectionately. As He gives natural light in creatures and arts, so He gives supernatural in revelations. IV. THIS HEAVENLY KNOWLEDGE IS OFFERED TO THE MEANEST. It is preached in villages. To show that God is no respecter of persons. To bind men the more to God. V. THE WAY TO THIS HEAVENLY KNOWLEDGE IS PLAIN AND EASY. It is cried about the streets; it is taught in all languages; it is taught by earthly similitudes as in parables abundantly. (*Francis Taylor.*) *She uttereth her voice in the streets.*—*The voices of the street*:—We are all ready to listen to the voices of nature—of the mountain, the sea, the storm, the star. How few learn anything from the voices of the noisy and dusty street. Learn—I. THAT THIS LIFE IS A SCENE OF TOIL AND STRUGGLE. Can it be that passing up and down these streets on your way to work you do not learn anything of the world's toil, and anxiety, and struggle? II. THAT ALL CLASSES AND CONDITIONS OF SOCIETY MUST COMMINGLE. We sometimes culture a wicked exclusiveness. All classes of people are compelled to meet on the street. The democratic principle of the gospel recognises the fact

that we stand before God on one and the same platform. III. THAT IT IS A VERY HARD THING FOR A MAN TO KEEP HIS HEART RIGHT AND TO GET TO HEAVEN. Infinite temptations spring upon us from these places of public concourse. IV. THAT LIFE IS FULL OF PRETENSION AND SHAM. What subterfuge, what double-dealing, what two-facedness! V. THAT THE STREET IS A GREAT FIELD FOR CHRISTIAN CHARITY. There are hunger, and suffering, and want, and wretchedness in the country; but these evils chiefly congregate in our great cities. On every street crime prowls, and drunkenness staggers, and shame winks, and pauperism thrusts out its hand, asking for alms. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?—*The simplicity of unregenerate men*:—I. I AM TO SHOW IN WHAT RESPECTS EVERY UNREGENERATE SINNER MAY BE SAID TO BE A "SIMPLE ONE." They may be very far from this character, in point of natural sagacity, acquired learning, and speculative knowledge of religious things. But, after all, they are really simple. 1. The unregenerate are simple, in that they are satisfied with slight, superficial apprehensions of God. 2. The unregenerate are simple, in their being satisfied with slight thoughts of sin. 3. They are simple, in that they are easily induced to mistake good and evil, to put the one for the other. 4. They are simple, as to believing the strength of sin in their own hearts. They do not think their hearts so corrupt and prone to iniquity as described in Jer. xvii. 9. 5. In consequence of these things, they are easily seduced into sin, and led to entire apostasy from their former seeming faith and holiness. 6. They are simple, as to the ground on which they imagine their spiritual state to be good. They are surprised at the niceness and scrupulousness of the saints in this matter. 7. And as to the approaches of death and eternity: these steal upon them at unawares. The saints see death in its causes—the holiness of God, and the sinfulness of man. II. THIS SIMPLICITY IS LOVED BY SINNERS. It is not a harmless weakness, but attended with deadly obstinacy. 1. They have a kind of happiness, notwithstanding of it, which suits their carnal taste. 2. This happiness depends on the continuance of their simplicity. For a little Divine wisdom would annihilate that dream, and make their present joys tasteless. 3. They have an aversion to that happiness which is truly Divine and holy. 4. Therefore, to part with this simplicity seems to them to be just the same thing as running into despair. 5. Therefore, either in the way of deceit or of violence, they resist the means of illumination. III. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN GOD'S OBSERVING THE TIME THAT A SINNER CONTINUES IN THIS CHARACTER? 1. It is founded in His omniscience. 2. And in His character as the Judge of all. 3. Because every act of sin in the heart hath its own malignity. 4. Every period of impenitence is an aggravation of all past sins. 5. God is unwearied in this observation (Isa. xl. 28). 6. This observation is recorded that the sinner himself may be brought to such an accurate remembrance of his sins as is necessary for his taking in a sense of Divine wrath (Psa. l. 21). (*J. Love, D.D.*) **Scorners delight in their scorning.**—*Delight in scorning*:—I shall arrange the matter of this scorning in different classes, so as to begin with the ultimate and fundamental objects of scorning, and gradually to come down to the more immediate, and those which are obvious to common observation. I. SUCH THINGS AS RELATE TO THE DIVINE NATURE AND CHARACTER IN GENERAL. 1. The infinite holiness of God. 2. The infinite justice of God. 3. All the natural excellences of the Divine nature. When these natural excellences of strength, wisdom, eternity, &c., are considered as clothed with the moral lustre of infinite holiness, justice, &c., their beauty is converted into gloom and horror to the sinner. He hates, and therefore derides them. 4. The mercy of God. II. SUCH THINGS AS RELATE TO THE MANIFESTATION OF THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD, IN HIS WAY OF SAVING SINNERS: BECAUSE THE GLORY OF GOD, AS ABOVE DESCRIBED, SHINES FORTH IN THIS WAY. 1. The sovereign counsels, purposes, and compacts of the Three Persons in the Godhead concerning the salvation of sinners. 2. The solemn, holy, and glorious operations of the Godhead, in the actual procurement of salvation, in the incarnation and humiliation of the Second Person in the glorious Trinity. While the Redeemer was on earth, there was a multitude of sinners who poured out their hostile scorn upon Him, especially when He was upon the Cross (Psa. xxii. 7, &c.). 3. The holy operations of the Spirit of God, in the Person of Christ, and in His people. III. THE MANIFESTATIONS OF GOD, IN THE CHARACTER AND LIVES OF HIS CHILDREN. Here, the excellences of God are brought near to the eyes of natural men; and there are two reasons why the natural enmity is more exercised against the saints than directly against God. 1. They have more lively views of the holiness of the saints than they have of the holiness of God Himself. 2. Because there is greater appearance of impunity. This enmity at

the saints shows itself in derision. 1. At their sins. The wicked will give no quarter to the least sin in a child of God. 2. At their sinless infirmities. 3. At the success of their efforts to draw them into sin (Isa. xxix. 21). 4. Nicknaming their graces, and then taking liberty to ridicule them. 5. The sorrows and joys of the saints. 6. The hopes and fears of the saints; for the same reasons as above. 7. The counsels and reproofs of the saints. IV. SUCH THINGS AS RELATE TO THE PURE AND SPIRITUAL WORSHIP OF GOD. 1. This is a combination of all the things already mentioned. 2. The spiritual substance of Divine worship is itself hateful to the sinner; and that considered both as an exercise of sanctified self-love and as springing from disinterested, voluntary love to God—particularly in this last view. 3. But the sinner frequently dares not to avow this; not from any want of enmity, but from a sneaking, cowardly dread of God. And therefore he fixes his ridicule upon the outside of the service of God. Here he nibbles, and plays off his sordid artillery. V. THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD. 1. The external operations of the power and wisdom of God in the visible world, when considered by themselves, detachedly from His moral administration, are indeed the lowest of His works. There is least of what is peculiarly Divine apparent in them. 2. But if the external manifestations of God, in the creation, are considered as intimately connected with His moral character, then even the goodness of God therein appears under a gloom, if it be considered as leading on the sinner to repentance, under certification of double vengeance if he repent not, and as giving a low picture of his superior and sublime goodness as to moral things (Rom. ii. 4, 5). 3. And, much more, external judgments. There seems nothing so material in sin as to justify external calamities. (*Ibid.*) *Nothing to replace the Christian religion*:—Lord Chesterfield being at supper with Voltaire and Madame C—, the conversation turned on the affairs of England. "I think, my lord," said the lady, "that the Parliament of England consists of five or six hundred of the best informed and most sensible men in the kingdom." "True, madam, they are generally supposed to be so." "What, then, can be the reason they should tolerate so great an absurdity as the Christian religion?" "I suppose, madam, it is because they have not been able to substitute anything better in its stead; when they can, I doubt not but in their wisdom they will readily accept it." **Turn you at My reproof.**—*Turning from evil*.—1. What voices does Wisdom find in each generation? Parent-voice; teacher-voice; experience-voice; revelation-voice; Christ's voice. 2. Where does Wisdom raise her voice? For them that have ears to hear, anywhere, everywhere. 3. What is the message which the voice delivers? I. AN ASSERTION. You need to be turned. This is not the message we expect Wisdom to bring. She should say, "Study. Seek good teachers. Think. Read." She does say, "Turn"; and so she reveals the one deep and universal need. Simple ones, turn from folly. Scorners, turn from the deceit of scorning. Fools, turn from your wilful, wicked ways. The first thing Wisdom would have us do is change. The first call of Christ, the true Wisdom, is, "Repent." II. A TRUTH. You must turn yourselves. The call is based on our possession of will, and on the fact that we have hitherto made such misguided, such ruinous, choices with our wills. Wisdom calls for a new and different exercise of our will. There is a sense in which we cannot save ourselves; there is a sense in which nobody can save us but ourselves. We can shift it on nobody's shoulders. Therefore the Divine persuasions are, "Choose; turn." III. A DUTY. You ought to turn at once. Under the constraint of such gracious promises and persuasions. For Wisdom wins as well as calls. She promises to give her spirit, the love of knowledge, the joy of knowing, to all who will turn from selfish pleasure's giddy ways. And Christ persuades and promises that He may win. He promises "the life that now is, and the life that is to come." 1. Pardon. 2. Cleansing. 3. Healing. 4. Conscious sonship. 5. Love. 6. Joy unspeakable. 7. Heaven. From dead-works—turn. From worldly pleasures—turn. From self-seekings—turn. From sin—turn. Let the call of Wisdom and of Christ ring in our ears wherever we go, in busy street, in quiet home, in bustling business, in lonely room. (*Weekly Pulpit.*) *Sinners admonished*:—Various are the means which the Lord employs to convince the wicked of the error of their ways, and bring them to a knowledge of Divine truth. I. THE REPROOFS HE ADMINISTERS. 1. By the Scriptures, which contain the most pointed and salutary admonitions, sending us for instruction and reproof to—(1) The works of creation; (2) examples of impiety; (3) the awful solemnities of death and the grave. 2. By ministers. They persuade men by the terrors of the Lord, and encourage them by the promises of the gospel. 3. By conscience. The internal and universal monitor; the witness to all our proceedings. It speaks

with sovereign authority. 4. By providence. By—(1) Pious parents; (2) family connections; (3) godly neighbours; (4) by afflictions, and difficulties; (5) by the death of our fellow-mortals. II. THE SUBMISSION HE REQUIRES. He invites return—1. With penitent hearts. Genuine repentance includes—(1) Conviction of sin; (2) humiliation of soul; (3) compunction of spirit; (4) holy indignation and shame; (5) humble confession to God. 2. With believing minds. By faith we—(1) Credit the gospel; (2) embrace the Saviour; and (3) realise salvation. 3. With fervent devotion. We should call upon Him—(1) Sincerely; (2) humbly; (3) confidently; (4) fervently; (5) diligently. 4. With prompt obedience. Religion requires an universal renunciation of the principles and habits of vice, and an entire devotedness to God, both of heart and life. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT HE IMPARTS. “Pour out My Spirit.” The participation of the Holy Ghost is an inestimable privilege, which includes every holy principle that He implants, and every gracious disposition which He requires. The Spirit of God is—1. A convincing Spirit. He opens the eyes of our understanding; and He imparts a spiritual discernment (John xvi. 8–11). 2. A quickening Spirit. He removes the death of sin, and infuses the life of grace. 3. A comforting Spirit. 4. A sanctifying Spirit. He is called “the Spirit of holiness.” He sanctifies His people wholly, and preserves them blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. v. 23). (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Hindrances to spiritual progress*:—I. GOD REQUIRES NOTHING MORE THAN MAN CAN DO. The text requires men to do something; and it promises assistance only on the condition that they make use of some strength which it supposes them to possess. But it does not require of them that they should change their hearts or renew their natures. They are to “turn at God’s reproof,” and it is assumed that they might turn if they would. We enjoin on men that they set vigorously about the reforming what they know to be wrong, and the cultivating what they know to be right. The command of the text does not overrate the powers of those to whom it is addressed. II. GOD MAKES A GRACIOUS PROMISE. We assume that the help of God’s Spirit is indispensable to our taking the first step, as well as the last, in the path of salvation. But our turning is the condition of our obtaining the Spirit. No men are altogether without the inward strivings of the Spirit. Because the Spirit is not acting apparently in a man’s renewal, we may not assume that He is not acting. He may be engaged in preparatory work. Turn at God’s reproof, and you will receive the Spirit in its renovating power, and have the wisdom which is strength, and peace, and life, and immortality. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) I will pour out My Spirit unto you.—*The gift of the Spirit*:—Some take it for illumination only, and gifts of knowledge. So it agrees well with the words that follow, “I will make known My words unto you.” If ye hearken to My reproof I will tell you more of My mind. Ye shall know more of heavenly truths. Others take it for sanctifying gifts of the Spirit. I. THEY THAT WILL TURN TO GOD SHALL NOT WANT THE PLENTIFUL HELP OF GOD’S SPIRIT TO DIRECT THEM. They will pray for God’s Spirit. Encourage men to turn to God, for then they shall have His Spirit for their instructor, sanctifier, and comforter. II. THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD MUST GO TOGETHER TO GUIDE. Both are joined in this verse. A lying spirit it must needs be that contradicts God’s plain Word. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Vers. 24–28. Because I have called, and ye refused.—*The rejected call of Wisdom*:—I. THE MANNER IN WHICH IT HAS CALLED UPON YOU—in which the appeals of Wisdom and of religion have been made. In the manner, the variety, the intensity, the tenderness, the unwearied nature, and the sleepless watchfulness of appeal, nothing has occurred that can be compared with the calls which have been made to you to abandon a sinful course and to give your heart to God. II. THE MANNER OF THE RECEPTION OF THIS CALL. You have neglected these calls and warnings; you paid no attention to them, as if they did not pertain to you, or as if they had no claim to your regard. You have argued against the truth; you have cavilled against the truth; you have urged excuses that you might not obey the truth; you have sought plausible reasons for neglecting to do what you knew to be your duty; you have taken refuge under the imperfections of Christians for not being yourself a Christian. You have done this long. In some cases it has been the work of a life; in all cases it has been a leading object of life thus far. III. THE EFFECT OF NEGLECTING AND DISREGARDING THESE CALLS. “When your fear cometh,” &c. Your wealth cannot save you; your accomplishments cannot save you. Death cares for none of these things. 1. You will die, and the fear of death will come upon you. 2. The fear of the judgment day will come upon you, for that cannot

always be avoided. IV. WHEN THESE THINGS COME IT WILL BE TOO LATE TO CRY FOR MERCY. There must be a limit to the calls of religion and mercy, for life is very brief, and they all lie this side the grave. Can you suppose that He will always appeal to the sceptic and the caviller, and bear with his scepticism and cavils through a vast eternity? This cannot be; and somewhere there must be a limit to the offers of mercy to men. That may occur before you shall reach the death-bed, short as is the journey thither. May not the mind become so worldly, and the heart so vain, and the conscience so "seared," and the life so wicked, and the will so obdurate, and the whole soul so utterly shattered and ruined by sin, that conversion shall be hopeless and ruin certain? It may occur on the death-bed: then the cry for mercy may be vain. And there is a world where the cry of mercy is never heard. Embrace the call, whether to you it be the last or not, and your eternal welfare will be secure. (*A. Barnes, D.D.*) *The folly and danger of refusing the calls of mercy*.—I. THAT GOD CALLS ON SINNERS. 1. This is clear from many parts of Scripture (Isa. lv. 1, 3, 6, &c., lxx. 1, 2; Ezek. xviii. 30, 31). 2. The end to which He calls us in these different ways is to repent and turn from our sins, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts xx. 21; Mark i. 15). As to the nature and manner of those calls, they are—(1) Kind and gracious; they are full of love, tenderness, and pity (Deut. xxxii. 29; Hos. xi. 8; Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xix. 41, 42). What moving exhortations are these! (2) They carry the highest reason and persuasion along with them. It is to avoid our own ruin and secure our own happiness. (3) They last but for a season. His patience will at last be worn out by our many obstinate refusals. The shining day of grace at last ends in the eternal shades of night (Matt. xxiii. 38; Isa. lxvi. 4; Jer. vii. 13–15). II. THAT SINNERS TOO OFTEN REFUSE TO HEARKEN TO THE CALLS OF GOD. Many hear the gospel calls, but few are obedient to them. The old world would not be reformed by the preaching of Noah. The Israelites stoned the prophets that were sent to them (Jer. vii. 24–26; 2 Chron. xxiv. 21). Now, whence can this proceed, that so many are disobedient to the heavenly call? 1. It is partly owing to unbelief. 2. Others slight the Word because they are prejudiced against the messenger that brings it, regarding his imperfections and inadvertencies more than the weight of those things which he delivers. 3. Others do it through ignorance: darkness and blindness of mind make them hardened and obstinate. They know not God, their sinful state, their need of Christ, nor the beauty and excellency of spiritual things. 4. Others through pride reject the calls of God (Rev. iii. 17). 5. Others through love of the world. The business of the world engrosses their time, and the pleasures of it entirely captivate their affections. 6. Others through a false peace. III. THE EVIL AND DANGER OF REFUSING TO HEARKEN TO GOD'S CALLS, HIS COUNSEL AND REPROOF. 1. It is the most heinous ingratitude to God. 2. It is a contempt of God's power. 3. We rob ourselves of the greatest advantages. 4. By rejecting the calls of God we run ourselves into the greatest misery and ruin. What threatenings and woe are denounced against the obstinate sinner! I now come to apply the subject. 1. Let us admire the mercy of God in thus calling sinners. 2. Let such as have obeyed the calls of God rejoice therein; they have cause of eternal joy and eternal thankfulness. 3. Let such as have shut their ears against the calls of God be persuaded now to hearken to them. (*T. Hannam.*) *Irreversible chastisements*:—These words are awful, but not hopeless; they pronounce God's judgment on the finally impenitent; the penitent they but awaken, that they may "hear the voice of the Son of God and live." The sentence pronounced is final. If, hearing, men will not hearken, a time will come when all these calls will but increase their anguish and misery. Because these words relate to the day of judgment, is there no sense in which they are fulfilled in this life? It should appal any one to find that they do not appal him. Conscience bears witness that he has been one of those against whom the words denounce woe. All suffering, mental or bodily, has a twofold character; it is at once punishment and chastisement; it at once expresses God's hatred for sin and mercy to the sinner; it is at once the wrath and love of Almighty God. Of God's judgments, many are for this life without remedy. God warns that He may not strike; but, when He does strike, a man's whole life is changed. To certain courses of sin God annexes certain punishments, and although, for a time and up to a certain degree of sin, they may not, to any extent, follow, yet, beyond that bound, they do follow irresistibly, irreversibly. Manifold diseases "of mind, body, or estate," whereby God chastens sin, have this in common, that there is no certain time when the blow comes. We cannot tell the rule by which God dispenseth suffering and loss. To us they seem to fall more suddenly on

some, while others go on longer without visible punishment. We only know that happy they who are chastened soonest. The judgments God is constantly sending should awe us all, especially such as are even half-conscious that there is some besetting sin, slight as it may seem, to which they are continually yielding. Unheedful, such permit sin to accumulate after sin. And sin after sin is filling up the measure of their provocations and the fearful treasure of the wrath of Almighty God. All sin must be eating out the love of God and His life in the soul. If God's fire do fall, then man's only wisdom is, with what strength he has, darkened though his path be by the bewildering of past sin, to grope his way onward in the new path wherein God has set him. The past is, in one sense, closed. He has been tried, has failed, and is in this way, perhaps, tried no more. His trial is changed. If we failed, we have missed what, by God's grace, we might have become. Man may gather hope from the very severity of God's punishments. While we mourn our neglect of past calls, our sorrow, which is still His gift and call within us, will draw down His gladdening look, which will anew call us unto Him. As we would hear the last blissful call, hearken we each one of us to the next, whereby He calleth us to break off any, the very slightest, evil, or to gird ourselves to any good, and follow Him without delay. (*E. B. Pusey, D.D.*)

God and the impenitent sinner.—I. GOD AND THE IMPENITENT SINNER IN PROBATION. 1. God's conduct towards the sinner in probation. (1) He calls them, by His Word, His ministry, His Spirit. (2) He stretches out His hand to them. "His arms are outstretched to receive them." (3) He counsels them. Presents lessons of wisdom to them. (4) He reproves them. Rebukes them for their sins. 2. The sinner's conduct towards God in probation. (1) They refuse His call. "Ye refused." (2) They disregard His outstretched hands. "No man regarded." (3) They set at nought His counsel. They rejected His "reproof."

II. GOD AND THE IMPENITENT SINNER IN RETRIBUTION. 1. God's conduct towards the impenitent sinner in retribution. (1) He laughs at their distress. "I will laugh at your calamity." Their distress is great. Their destruction has come as a "whirlwind," and what is more, it has grown out of their conduct. "They eat of the fruit of their own way." (2) He disregards their prayers. "I will not answer." 2. The impenitent sinner's conduct towards God. They cried to Him for help. They may bitterly call upon Me, "but I will not answer." There is earnest prayer in hell, but it is fruitless. (*Homilist.*)

Wisdom personified, and love incarnate.—Wisdom is one of the Divine attributes; and Christ "is of God made unto us wisdom," as well as "righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." We may surely expect, then, that up to a certain point the utterances of Wisdom and of Christ would coincide; so that in these passages in the Book of Proverbs we should be able to find, as we find throughout the whole of the Old Testament, some portion of "the testimony of Jesus." But does it follow that because some, or even many, of Wisdom's utterances may be correctly spoken of as the words of Christ Himself, therefore all of them may be so regarded? To see how utterly foolish is this way of reasoning, we have only to remember how many of David's words not only coincide with those of Christ, but are actually quoted in the New Testament as if Christ Himself had uttered them; and yet no one is so foolish as to insist that all the words of David can be safely put into the mouth of Christ. As we said at the beginning, wisdom is one of the attributes of God; and therefore the words of Wisdom must be, up to a certain point, the expression of the Divine mind. We may say that Wisdom expresses the mind of God in creation, in providence, in the whole realm of law. And in this realm, as well as in the realm of grace, the Son of God has His place as the Revealer. We may regard Christ and Wisdom as identical throughout the realm of natural law; so that no error would result from the substitution of the one for the other within that range of truth; but when we leave the realm of law and enter that of grace, it is entirely different; then it may not only be injurious but fatal to take the utterances of mere wisdom and put them into the mouth of Christ. If Christ had been only wisdom, He could not have heard the sinner's prayer. But He is also "righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption"; and that makes all the difference, for now that He has made an atonement for our sins and opened up the way of life, He can speak, not only in the name of wisdom, but of pardoning mercy and redeeming grace; and, accordingly, far from laughing at calamity and scorning the penitent's prayer, which wisdom if it were alone might do, He can, and will, and does "save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." Having thus considered the extent to which we may expect to find "the testimony of Jesus" in the words of Wisdom, let us now test the principle we have

laid down by an examination of the passage. The paragraph begins with this bold and striking personification: "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, saying"—and then follows the passage with which we have mainly to do. Let us, then, listen to Wisdom's cry, and observe how truthfully and powerfully it is translated into the language of men. We shall see its truth to nature better if we first look back a little. She begins, not with a cry, but with tender words of counsel and of promise (vers. 8, 9), "My son, hear the instruction of thy father," &c. These are the tender and kindly words of counsel in which she addresses the young man setting out in life. Following this are tender and yet solemn words of warning against the tempter whom every one must meet (ver. 19): "My, son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not," &c. But now time passes on, and Wisdom's *protégé* begins to go astray, to forget the instruction of the father and the loving law of the mother; and so now she lifts up her voice and cries, entreating the wanderer to turn before it is too late (vers. 22, 23). Time passes on, and the warning cry has been as little heeded as had been the tender voice of Wisdom at the first. The son, instead of being prudent, has been rash; he has been, not economical, but extravagant; not temperate, but dissipated; and so he has gone on till his last opportunity has been thrown away, his patrimony squandered, his health gone, his last friend lost. Then once more his early monitor appears. The prodigal remembers the tender words of counsel and of promise. He remembers how, when he was just beginning to go astray, before he had become hopelessly entangled in evil, Wisdom lifted up her voice and cried. For a long time his old counsellor has not been present to his mind at all. He has been hurrying on in courses of evil, but now his very wretchedness forces him to stop and think. And, again, there stands Wisdom before him. How does she address him now? Does she speak to him in soothing tones? Does she promise to restore him his money, or his health, or his friends? Alas, no: she cannot. All she can say is, "I told you it would be so. I warned you what would be the end; and now the end has come. You must eat the fruit of your own ways, and be filled with your own devices." That is positively all that Wisdom can say; and there is no tenderness in her tone. She seems to mock him rather, she seems to laugh at his calamity. Such is the voice of Wisdom in the end to those who have despised her counsel in the beginning. And is not the whole representation true to nature? Yes, it is perfectly true that "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets," and says these things so loudly that no listening ear can fail to hear them. It is no matter of deep philosophy. It is no ecclesiastical or theological dogma. It belongs to the Proverbs, the proverbs of the streets. The merit of Solomon, in this chapter, is not in telling us something we should not otherwise have known; but in putting what everybody knows in a very striking form. I question whether in all literature there can be found any more vivid and alarming description of the terror and despair of a remorseful conscience, as it looks back and recalls, when too late, the neglected counsels alike of earthly and of heavenly wisdom. So far Wisdom; and if it were only with her that sinners had to do, it would go hard, not only with the profligate and openly vicious, but with the most respectable. But He with whom we have to do is not known as wisdom. He is wise indeed; and all wisdom is from Him. But there is that in Him which is higher than wisdom. "God is love." Wisdom is the expression of His will in the realm of law; but love is the expression of Himself. The love of God is not a lawless love. It is not at variance with wisdom. The law which ordains that the sinner must eat of the fruit of his own way and be filled with his own devices cannot be set aside by the mere emotion of compassion. Hence it was necessary, in order to redeem man from the condemnation of sin, that the Holy One of God should suffer. Hence, too, it is that, though by the suffering and death of Christ believers in Him are set free from the condemnation of sin, yet the natural consequences of the transgressions of wisdom's laws are not abolished. If health has been wasted, it will not be miraculously restored. If money has been squandered, there must be suffering from the want of it. If character has been forfeited by dishonesty and impurity, it may never be redeemed on this side the grave. The laws of wisdom are not repealed or set at naught; they remain in force. But such has been the ingenuity, so to speak, of the Divine love, that without infringing on the proper domain of wisdom expressing itself in law, the way has been opened up for the full pardon and ultimate restoration even of those who have wandered farthest and sinned most. And accordingly, a passage like this awful one in the

first chapter of the Book of Proverbs, instead of obscuring the Divine love in the smallest degree, or interposing so much as a thread between the sinner and his Saviour, rather serves as a background on which to set forth the radiant form of the Saviour of mankind,

“ Whose love appears more orient and more bright,
Having a foil whereon to show its light.”

(J. M. Gibson, D.D.) *A neglected warning*:—Some years ago a terrible inundation occurred in North Holland, due entirely to neglected warnings. The dykes, as the custom is, are inspected by a dyke engineer on certain days every year. A farmer reported the dangerous condition of one repeatedly, but whether from carelessness or because he considered it interference, the engineer laughed at all his fears, saying the dyke would stand many years yet. Not long after, during a violent storm, part of the dyke was carried away by the waters. In a short time several villages, and miles of cultivated land, were under water, many lives being lost. (S. S. Chronicle.) *Critical periods in a sinner's life*:—Every sinner, while unreconciled to God, is in constant and imminent danger of the loss of all things. Yet there are seasons of special danger, periods in his life when, unless he repent and turn to God, he ripens very fast for judgment. I. THE SEASON OF YOUTH IS ONE. The mind is then receptive, the heart is tender, the character is unformed, evil habits are not yet matured, and all things invite. It is “flood-tide,” and is sure to lead on to victory if he takes advantage of it. But neglected, thrown away, the future is almost sure to miscarry. II. THE PERIOD OF CONVICTION OF SIN IS ONE OF EXTREME PERIL. Then the sinner is on the threshold of life. But hesitating, grieving the Spirit, turning back, losing his conviction, he may be ruined for ever. III. THE PERIOD OF DIVINE CHASTISEMENTS IS A CRITICAL PERIOD. God's end in these usually is to reclaim men. To sin on in spite of them; to refuse to be corrected; to wax worse and worse in the day of trial, and under God's afflictive dispensations, is to run a fearful risk of final and eternal abandonment. (Anon.) *I also will laugh at your calamity.—Retribution*:—We have here a personification of that attribute of God which is specially employed in words of counsel and admonition, and is here made to represent God. The voice of Wisdom is the voice of God. I. THE MERCIFUL APPEAL OF GOD TO SINNERS, AND ITS REJECTION. 1. God is said to call. 2. God is said to stretch out His hand. In the gesture of earnest appeal, making use of arguments of deed as well as of word. Providence warns. The hand of God in history demonstrates what providence in its dealings with individuals teaches, that virtue and happiness, vice and misery, go hand in hand; that morality and self-interest in the long run merge; that the path of duty and the path of safety coincide. 3. God is said to counsel. The message of Scripture, with its manifold invitations and warnings, is faithfully delivered. 4. God is said to reprove. By severe strokes of discipline God speaks to those who in their infatuation have refused to pay attention to His former appeals. But the rod of correction may be disregarded. The possibility of such reckless opposition to the merciful appeal of God demonstrates the power of the evil principle in fallen human nature. We have here a complete reversal of the ordinary principles of self-interest which actuate men in all circumstances, except in the sphere of morality. II. THE DESPAIRING APPEAL OF SINNERS TO GOD, AND ITS FUTILITY. Their position, as here depicted—1. It is unspeakably awful. The text speaks of calamity, of fear, of desolation, of destruction like a whirlwind, of distress and anguish. The text speaks of a terrible aggravation of their distress, occasioned by the stinging sarcasm which accompanies their suffering. 2. It is strictly retributive. All their suffering has been earned by themselves. As they formerly eluded Him in His efforts to seek and to save them, so now He will not be found of them. 3. It is utterly hopeless. The futility of their appeal is absolute. Their cry is the cry of blank despair. They have sinned away their day of grace, and their offended God will be entreated of them no more. It may be said that the moral sense is shocked by such a representation of God's conduct towards impenitent sinners as that which we have drawn from the text. Our reply is, that it is presumptuous for any mortal to say what is, and what is not, in harmony with the Divine perfection, or consistent with the Divine character. In nature we know God can assume an attitude of sternness. In the moral sphere there may be occasions when He shall stand forth as an inflexible Ruler, as an immovable, righteous Judge. (A. O. Smith, B.A.)

The after-time for the sinner :—Wisdom is represented as calling, waiting, pleading; but, as concerning some who heard the call, altogether in vain. At last Wisdom grows indignant, as well she may. In carrying out His gracious purpose of revealing Himself to us, God may use every act and every feeling that is genuine to man. It is quite proper that men should deride the proud and the malicious when they are baffled and put to shame, and this natural feeling is here used to represent the feeling of God towards those who contemptuously despise the riches of His grace. The merely human gave the tone to the revelations of God that were made in Old Testament times. It is the divinely human—it is humanity at its best—which gives tone to all the representations of God made in the New Testament. So we have now severities and indignations, even the “wrath of the Lamb,” but not derisions, not scorn, not any “laughing at calamity.” The text does but express the feeling we have when the wicked meet their deserts. I. EVIL HAS ITS CERTAIN FIXED CONSEQUENCES. Law equally reigns in the moral and in the material world. Every moral action has its certain and well-defined consequences. II. NOTHING CHECKS CONSEQUENCES BUT THE REMOVAL OF CAUSES. Illustrate from cases of infectious disease. Man’s great evil is wilfulness, and to remove this ever-fruitle source of moral mischief requires no less than a regeneration. III. BY THE RESISTANCE OF GOOD COUNSEL THE EVIL GROWS STRONGER. He who goes after sin has to resist much counsel and persuasive influence. And this is the ever-working law, good resisted leaves evil stronger. IV. IF EVIL GROWS STRONGER, ITS CONSEQUENCES MUST BECOME MORE SERIOUS, AND WILL BE BROUGHT ON MORE RAPIDLY. The simple ones turn deaf ears, and hurry after the tempters; and then their “fear comes as desolation.” V. EVIL MAY GROW BEYOND ALL INFLUENCE OF REPROOF, AND THEN ITS ISSUES MUST PROVE OVERWHELMING INDEED. Men may get beyond the reach of all available moral influences. Conceive what that condition must be. Compare the state of the “devil-possessed.” A most awful and alarming picture is that of a moral being abusing himself until he actually becomes insusceptible of moral impressions. In those who resist moral counsel and invitation a wilfulness grows up which becomes every day more difficult to overcome; a process of heart-hardening is actually going on. Be warned, then, of the “wrath of the Lamb.” (*Weekly Pulpit*.) And your destruction cometh as a whirlwind.—*The figure of the whirlwind* :—In eastern countries, so rapid and impetuous sometimes is the whirlwind that it is in vain to think of flying; the swiftest horse or the fastest sailing ship could be of no use to carry the traveller out of danger. Torrents of burning sand roll before it, the firmament is enveloped in a thick veil, and the sun appears of the colour of blood. The Arab who conducted Mr. Bruce through the frightful deserts of Senaar pointed out to him a spot among some sandy hillocks, where the ground seemed to be more elevated than the rest, where one of the largest caravans which ever came out to Egypt, to the number of several thousand camels, was covered with sand. The destruction of Sennacherib’s army (2 Kings xix. 25) was probably (comp. Isa. xxxvii. 7) by the blast of the hot pestilential south wind blowing from the deserts of Lybia, called the simoom. (*B. E. Nicholls, M.A.*)

Ver. 28. Then shall they call upon Me, but I will not answer.—*Sowing disobedience, reaping judgment* :—One of the marvellous reasonings of the Judge with the criminal is recorded here. I. GOD IN MERCY VISITS A REBELLIOUS GENERATION. 1. The call. It is in the earthquake and in the storm. Day unto day proclaims it, and night unto night. There is no speech or language where it is not heard. The call has come with distinct articulation from the lips of prophets and apostles. It sounds with authority in a human conscience. 2. The hands stretched out. There is a way, and the way is open unto the Father. There is no obstruction, there is no forbidding, there is no upbraiding. Sinners are welcomed with open arms. 3. The counsel. Specially addressed to those who procrastinate. 4. Reproof. If they will not be enticed by the promise of heaven, He will threaten them with the fear of hell. Everlasting love needs a strong, hard instrument wherewith to work out her blessed purposes on an unpliant race. Judgment looming in reserve, serving meantime by its blackness to make the invitation more winning. II. A REBELLIOUS GENERATION NEGLECTS OR RESISTS THE GRACIOUS VISITATION OF GOD. Men have ears and stop them. III. THEY SHALL EAT THE FRUIT OF THEIR OWN WAYS, AND BE FILLED WITH THEIR OWN DEVICES. Judgment will be an exact answer to disobedience, as fruit answers to seed, or an echo to the sound. (*William Arnot, D.D.*) *The danger of deferring repentance* :—There is a good English proverb that “He who neglects the occasion, the occasion will neglect him.”

In previous verses we have a general proclamation (ver. 20); a merciful reprehension (ver. 22); a gracious exhortation (ver. 23); a yearning promise (end ver. 23); a gracious threatening. The words of the text are underclapt against all those that procrastinate their repentance and returning home to God. Note the parties themselves that do prolong this day of grace; their earnest and diligent seeking after God; the unseasonableness of the time of their seeking; and the frustration of their hopes. Those that will not hear when He calleth them, God will not hear when they call unto Him. Thus the Lord dealt with His people in Ezekiel's days. There is a double day, a white day, and a black day; a day of salvation and a day of damnation. There are three reasons for this point. 1. The law of retaliation. 2. The time of God's attributes. Both mercy and justice have their season in this life; and when mercy hath acted her part, then cometh justice upon the stage, and acteth her part. 3. It is God's use to do so in other things, even upon the contempt of temporal blessings, and therefore much more in matters of grace and salvation. Illustrated in the cases of the Israelites, Ishmael, King Saul, Esau. If God so severely punish contempt of temporal blessings, how will He punish contempt of proffers of grace and salvation? He will come with martial law against all those that condemn the gospel (John iii. 18). God doth commonly give men a day, but no man or angel doth know how long this day lasteth. God gave the angels a day, Cain a day, Nineveh a day, the antediluvian world a day. All we know is that this day is for us now. Now is the day of Christ upon you. What is the meaning of all those Scriptures which show how God doth deliver up men unto the spirit of giddiness, and unto the spirit of slumber? And what means the "hardening of men's hearts," and "searing of men's consciences," but only to show that the day of grace may end unto a particular man, ten, twenty, nay, forty years before his death. If thou refuse this day, thou refuseth all; for what knowest thou but this very day may be thy day? The reason is—1. Because God's patience is in His own breast, and who can tell how long it will last? 2. Because God's patience gives no mark or inkling of it before it ends. 3. Because God reckons up every hour. 4. It is a wonder that the day of grace is not ended already, and that thou art not now in hell. When Christ first comes to the soul, He witnesseth grace and mercy to thee if thou wilt repent and amend; yea, He witnesseth forgiveness of sins, redemption, and salvation, if thou wilt believe; but if not, He will be a swift witness against thee. (*William Fenner, B.D.*) *Nature's warning*:—This is a sublime dramatic utterance. It is Wisdom that is represented as speaking. By wisdom among the Orientals moral philosophy was understood, or science speaking on the side of morality. Taken in its largest way it is as if nature (in the text) had risen up, and had declared from her own seat, and by her own authority, what was the history of transgression against her fundamental laws. It is the voice of physiology; it is the voice of health, it is the voice of natural law. It is the voice of the poor-house, the gaol, the gallows, speaking out and telling men what are the ends of those ways which are essentially the violation of God's laws in nature. We see men violating the fundamental laws of health, strength, character, prosperity, and society, little by little, and because sentence is not speedily executed against evil-doers, they are presumptuous, and say, "How doth God know?" At a later stage, when the fatal work is done, and disease, decay, poverty, the coldness of men, the indifference of society, disgrace, neglect, infamy, suffering, and death come upon them, then they begin to call out in these several states, and condemn everybody but themselves. Then they seek to patch up their broken constitutions. Then they attempt to put on the aspects of honesty. Then they try to regraft themselves upon the tree from which they have been broken off, but largely in vain. They call, but nature will not hear. They plead unto deaf ears. I. LOOK AT THE MILDEST FORMS OF TRANSGRESSION—THOSE OF INDOLENCE AND SELF-INDULGENCE. How quietly men spend their lives doing nothing! But when they pass the meridian of life, and begin to go down the farther slope, they find that nobody cares for them. They are in everybody's way. The probabilities are that one who has spent the first part of his life in indolence and self-indulgence will spend the last part of his life in the same way. II. LOOK AT THE SAME THING AS IT TAKES PLACE IN REGARD TO A MAN'S REPUTATION. Every man is a character-builder. Every man is building himself up by his purposes, his deeds; and these form his character, and it is his character that stands by him. His reputation is simply the shadow that it casts. What a man is, is his character; and what men think him to be is his reputation. Men sometimes think they are building character when they are only getting reputation. Few are aware of this distinction, and so it comes to pass that many

men go steadily downward. They begin to violate the truth. They equivocate. They walk on the perilous edge of insincerity. And, notwithstanding this, they do not perceive any change in themselves. But any man who lacks simplicity very soon gets to be suspected by other people. Men are dishonest in the same way. They are tricky. Such a man goes on from day to day, and at last it is whispered of him, "That man is not honest," and presently all the world knows it except himself. III. LOOK AT THE SAME THING IN RESPECT TO THE SINS WHICH A MAN COMMITS AGAINST HIS OWN SELF. Of all wastefulness there is none like that which men commit upon their own persons. There are many ways in which men drain off the vitality of their whole brain and nervous system. Excessive virtuous industry will do it. Passionate self-indulgence will do it. Excessive addiction to stimulating drinks will do it. While there may be exceptional cases, the law for all such is destruction. The laws of nature have only a limit of mercy, but they have a limit of mercy. A man may be overtaken and yet may recover himself. There is a limited amount of atonement in nature. But there must be no presuming on it. The laws of nature are made for the obedient. Society is established for the obedient. It has very limited resources for reforming men. You are safe if you do not go down into vice. Let alone mischief before it be meddled with. Keep clear of all evil. Obedience is safe. Obedience to God in nature; in your own body; in the laws of society; obedience to God everywhere—that is absolutely safe, and nothing else is safe. Sin, however sweet and smooth and safe it may seem, is not safe. It is safe to be right; it is dangerous to be wrong. (*H. W. Beecher.*) **They shall not find Me.—Who seek and do not find?**—Scripture speaks of men calling upon God, and of His refusing to hear them. And yet our Lord said, "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." How explain this seeming contradiction? These things are not said of the same persons, or rather of the same characters, at the same time. What if I were to say that now, at this very moment, the words of the text are both applicable to us, and not applicable? The words were at no time in any man's earthly life so true as they will be at the day of judgment. Then they may be true in a greater or less degree; they may be substantially true in the life that now is. Is Christ's promise, "Seek, and ye shall find," equally true to all of us? Take most of us: suppose one of us to have reached boyhood with a bad disposition, ready for the first temptation, with habits of good uncultivated. Does God hear his prayers? Or in trying to turn from evil to good have you ever found your resolutions give way, till you fell back again to what you were at the beginning? In that case you sought God and failed to find Him. Or has it ever happened to you to have done a mischief to yourselves which you could not undo? Then you may realise that you may seek some good and be unable to attain. We know what it is that hinders God from hearing us always; because we are not thoroughly one in His Son Christ Jesus. The very feeling of coldness and unwillingness to pray, because we have often prayed in vain, is surely working in us that perfect death which is the full truth of the words of the text. (*Thomas Arnold, D.D.*) *The misery of late repentance after a wicked life*:—I. THERE IS A TIME WHEN WICKED MEN WILL BE OVERTAKEN WITH THOSE MISERIES THAT NO WARNING WOULD SERVE THEM TO PREVENT BY REPENTANCE AND REFORMATION. II. THEY WILL BE ONE DAY SENSIBLE OF THEIR OWN FOLLY, AND CRY UNTO GOD FOR MERCY AND DELIVERANCE. III. BUT GOD WILL NOT THEN REGARD THEIR REPENTANCE, NOR BE MOVED BY THEIR PRAYERS. For understanding—1. Lay down three things. (1) All sorts of calamities are meant by the wise man, which are either the natural effects of sin or other punishments of sin inflicted by the Divine justice, and that either in this world or in the world to come. (2) This proposition is not to be understood as if all wicked men were at last reduced to extreme misery in this life. All that need be said is this, either that they do often suffer those punishments in this life which their wicked doings naturally produce, or that the justice of God doth other ways overtake them in punishments that show the finger of God and a more immediate hand of providence. (3) If any go on in these practices upon which nature itself and God's curse besides have seemed to sentence miseries in this life, if some of them should happen to escape here, and live out their days without any great misfortune befalling them at last, yet there is a day coming when they shall not escape. One day they will smart for it. Under proposition II., understand that it is not to be understood universally as if every man reduced to extreme misery would infallibly apply himself to God for mercy, for we know there have been examples to the contrary, *e.g.*, Ahab. This seeking God's favour does frequently happen, but even they who do so are unhappy in their late

repentance, especially those that have had the most warnings and convictions, but would not be reclaimed. Under proposition III., show that this is the most awakening consideration of all, and hath the greatest force to make an effectual impression of the two former upon our minds. But this point requires careful interpretation, and a precise distinction between the miseries that an obstinate course of sin produces in this life and those punishments it will bring in another life. 1. How useless the prayers and repentance of wicked men will be as to the recovery of their happiness in this life! They are usually unprofitable as to those advantages which they have lost by their obstinate and, till now, incurable folly; such as health, plenty, and good name. And they will not procure them that comfort from the principles of religion which relieves good men under their adversities. 2. How unprofitable their importunity in seeking the mercy of God will be as to their escape in the day of judgment! For them who repent not till their turn comes in the other world, it will turn to no account for them; they must hear the irreversible sentence, and suffer the unavoidable effect of it for ever. And all this implies no want of goodness in God. (*W. Clagett, D.D.*) *Counsel rejected*:—Better stop now. Some years ago, near Princeton, New Jersey, some young men were skating on a pond around an "air-hole," and the ice began to break in. Some of them stopped; but a young man said, "I am not afraid! Give us one round more!" He swung nearly round, when the ice broke, and not until next day was his lifeless body found. So men go on in sin. They are warned. They expect soon to stop. But they cry, "Give us one round more!" They start, but with a wild crash break through into bottomless perdition. Do not risk it any longer. Stop now. God save us from the foolhardiness of the one round more! I thank God that I have been permitted to tell you which is the right road and which the wrong road. You must take one or the other. I leave you at the forks; choose for yourselves! (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 31. *Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way.*—*God's method of punishment*:—It is to let us punish ourselves. In this way man is led by bitter experience to see his own folly and God's wisdom. When we will not be guided by God He grants all our wishes and desires to show us how foolish and miserable they are. When a man is "cursed with every granted prayer" he learns by bitter experience that it is possible to be his own worst enemy. His long-indulged desires become tyrannical tormentors. The promises of God are conditional. He will give us good things if we will do our part; but not if we neglect it, or do the contrary to it. God has given us the dignity of freedom, which involves the terrible possibility of disobeying His commands. It is the best thing for the thoughtless and careless to be let alone of God. Those who look back over their lives can trace most of their errors to the fact that they have tried to take themselves, so to speak, away from the guidance of God. Within the man who delights in sin, and loves darkness rather than light, there is a hell of his own making, from which he cannot depart any more than from himself. Only those who are beyond reformation, and who have altogether decided for the devil, God in this way leaves alone to be creatures of their own appetites and the prey of their sins. On others God inflicts sharp discipline in order to make them like Himself. (*E. J. Hardy.*) *Vain regrets*:—A man in South Africa bought a piece of land for the purpose of farming it, but, after a short trial, finding it unsuitable for that purpose, and hearing that gold was found in the neighbourhood, set to work to see if he could find any, but failed. Disgusted with his purchase, he sold it for what it would fetch, getting what we would call "a mere song" for it. The man who bought it, having also heard that there was a likelihood of gold being found, lost no time in making a vigorous search, and was rewarded in finding both gold and diamonds, which made him rich beyond his wildest dreams. Some years afterwards the former owner, who had left the country, heard from an old friend that gold by the ton and diamonds by hundreds were being taken from his bit of land, and it is said that he gnashed his teeth with rage and chagrin, as, with his hands clenched until the nails entered the palms, he exclaimed, "Oh, what have I lost! what have I lost!" You who have not accepted Christ, take care that some day when salvation is no longer yours to take or refuse, you in the bitterness of anguish can only say, "Oh, what have I lost! what have I lost!"

Ver. 32. *The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.*—*Prosperity dangerous to virtue*:—By "fools" are here represented all wicked and vicious persons. The

misery of such persons is, that when God gives them what they most love, they perish in the embraces of it. The reasons for this are three. I. BECAUSE EVERY FOOLISH OR VICIOUS PERSON IS EITHER IGNORANT OR REGARDLESS OF THE PROPER ENDS AND USES FOR WHICH GOD DESIGNS THE PROSPERITY OF THOSE TO WHOM HE SENDS IT. Which ends are—1. To try and discover what is in a man. 2. To encourage men in a constant, humble expression of their gratitude to the bounty of their Maker, who deals forth such rich and plentiful provisions to His undeserving creatures. 3. To make them helpful in society. No man holds the abundance of wealth as a proprietor. II. BECAUSE PROSPERITY (AS THE NATURE OF MAN NOW STANDS) HAS A PECULIAR FORCE AND FITNESS TO ABATE MEN'S VIRTUES AND TO HEIGHTEN THEIR CORRUPTIONS. 1. For its abating their virtues. Virtue is such a plant as grows upon no ground save that which is tilled and cultivated with the severest labour. But what a stranger is toil and labour to a great fortune! 2. For heightening and inflaming men's corruptions. Nothing more effectually betrays the heart into a love of sin and a loathing of holiness than an ill-managed prosperity. The vices which particularly receive improvement by prosperity are—1. Pride. 2. Luxury and uncleanness. 3. Profaneness and neglect of God in the duties of religion. Those who lie soft and warm in a rich estate seldom come to heat themselves at the altar. III. BECAUSE PROSPERITY DIRECTLY INDISPOSES MEN TO THE PROPER MEANS OF THEIR AMENDMENT AND RECOVERY. 1. It renders them utterly averse to receiving counsel and admonition. 2. It unfits for the sharp trials of adversity which God uses to correct and reduce the soul. (1) He either faints and desponds and parts with his hope together with his possessions, or (2) he will murmur and blaspheme the God that afflicts him. The only way for a man not to find prosperity destructive is for him not to be a fool. This he may avoid by a pious observance of these following rules: 1. Let him consider on what weak hinges his prosperity and felicity hang. 2. Let him consider how little he is bettered by prosperity as to those perfections which are chiefly valuable. 3. Let a man correct the gaieties and wanderings of his spirit by the severe duties of mortification. Since the fool in his best—that is, in his most prosperous condition—stands tottering upon the very brink of destruction, we should solicit God, not for temporal enjoyment, but for a heart that may fit us for it, if it be God's will that prosperity be our lot. (*R. South, D.D.*) *The danger of prosperity*:—The title of "fool" is the usual character of the sinner in the language of Wisdom, in opposition to prudence. Prosperity comprehends all things desired by worldly men—riches, honours, pleasures, health, strength, peace, plenty, all that is grateful to the carnal mind and appetites. Prosperity abused is fatal and destructive to foolish sinners. I. PROSPERITY IS DESTRUCTIVE TO THE WICKED. There is no pestilence and contagion in the nature of things that are pleasing to our faculties. They are dangerous, not as made by God, but as managed by Satan. The primary design of God, in His most free and rich benefits, is to endeavor Himself to us and bind us to His service. When the wicked abuse God's blessings, defeat His kindness, and frustrate the excellent ends of it, He most righteously and severely continues their prosperity, that foment their lusts and renders them more wilful and incorrigible and the more guilty of their own damnation. Prosperity is a fatal ambush for their surprisal and ruin. Prosperity abused is destructive to sinners, both meritoriously, as it induces a deadly guilt and makes them obnoxious to the revenging wrath of God, and effectively, as it is opposite to the felicity and perfection of man. 1. Prosperity is the continual incentive of the vicious affections. 2. Prosperity occasionally incenses an irascible appetite. 3. Prosperity inclines sinners to an impious neglect of God. 4. Prosperity exposes dangerously to the tempting power of Satan. 5. Prosperity is destructive to many, in that it affords them advantages to corrupt others, and reciprocally exposes them to be corrupted by others. 6. Prosperity usually renders the means of grace ineffectual. 7. Prosperity renders men averse to suffering for the sake of Christ. 8. Prosperity makes men careless of evils that might happen. 9. Prosperity is the great temptation to delay repentance until the sinner's case is desperate. II. THE FOLLY OF PROSPEROUS SINNERS. Folly is the cause of their abusing prosperity and the effect of their prosperity abused. 1. The perfection of man consists in the excellences of his spiritual and immortal part. 2. All the prosperity in the world cannot bring true satisfaction to him that enjoys it, for it is disproportionate to the spiritual and immortal nature of the soul. The folly of the sinner is a voluntarily chosen folly, a culpable and guilty folly; the most ignominious folly, the most woful folly. III. THE JUSTICE, CERTAINTY, AND HEAVINESS OF THE JUDGMENT COMING ON

SINNERS WHO ABUSE THEIR PROSPERITY. Justice, for their destruction is the fruit of their own choice. Certainty, for it is unchangeably established by the Divine ordination that the pleasures of sin shall end in the misery of obstinate sinners. The heaviness will be according to the aggravation of their sin. Temporal prosperity is, therefore, no special sign of God's favour. (*William Bates, D.D.*)

The fool's prosperity:—I. THESE WORDS DESCRIBE THE UNGODLY. 1. By their present way of sin. 2. By their future state of misery. II. THEY DESCRIBE THE SIN OF THE UNGODLY. 1. By the occasion. 2. By the act. 3. By the habit. Prosperity and ease is the occasion; turning away from God and rejecting His counsel is the act; and folly or simplicity is part of the habit. III. THEY DESCRIBE THE GODLY. 1. By their obedience. They hearken. 2. By their privilege or reward. They be quiet from fear of evil. (1) It is so that "the prosperity of fools destroyeth them." (2) How folly and prosperity concur to their destruction. By the pleasing of their sensitive appetite and fancy, and so overcoming the power of reason. The more amiable the world appears, the more strongly it doth allure the soul to love it. Hereby it taketh the soul off from God. The very noise and bustle of earthly things divert their minds and hinder them from being serious. The sense of present ease and sweetness doth make them forget the change that is near. Pride lifts them up, so that God abhors them, and prosperity engages them in opposition to the word and ways and servants of the Lord. (3) The uses to make of the text. Do not grudge at the prosperity of ungodly men. Do not desire riches or prosperity. Honour those that are great and godly, rich and religious. Let great men have a double interest in your prayers. (*R. Baxter.*)

Self-slayers:—Suppose an iceberg possessed an intelligence and conscience; suppose it should say while dwelling in the polar region, "It is because of the sun that I am an iceberg," what would you answer? You would say, "It is not because of the sun, but because of your attitude towards the sun." Go down and place yourself beneath its melting rays, permit yourself to be enfolded in the arms of the Gulf Stream, and you will soon cease to be an iceberg, and become a part of the warm and gentle waters which enfold you. Or suppose we take this same truth in the realm of physical law. Many a Hindoo has stood for years with a napkin bound about his eyes that he might not see the sun, and when the cloth has been removed and he has sought to look upon that sun, he could not see. Behold, he had become blinded. Was it not he who had blinded himself? And yet, was it not also true that working through the natural law God had blinded him? There is a man sweeping toward Niagara, and I, standing on the shore, cry out, "Pull for the shore; the rapids are just below you, and you will go over the falls"; but he simply says to me, "God is too good to permit me to go over the falls"; and I cry again and he heeds not. But presently I see him grasp the oars. Alas, it is too late. Sweeping, whirling, plunging, his boat, like a cockle-shell, dashes over the cataract, and he is gone. Now we may say that the God who made water run down hill slew that man, but is the responsibility with Him? No. The man who knew that law and refused to recognise it slew himself. Well, men realise this in relation to their own physical organisation, because they realise that they have a physical constitution; but they do not realise that they have just as truly a moral constitution; that the laws of the one are as inevitable as the other; that in reference to the soul it is as true as of the body; "the soul that sinneth 'against the law of its being' shall die." (*G. T. Dowling, D.D.*)

Whoso hearkeneth unto Me shall dwell safely.—Quiet from the fear of evil:—The secret of a quiet life has been the great quest of man. The Confucian, the Buddhist, the Pythagorean have busied themselves with it, as well as Solomon. It was the motive of the mightiest movement of mediæval Christendom. Simeon on his pillar, Bernard in his cell, Francis in his rags, were all occupied with it; and in these restless, stormy, anxious times it is the question of questions still. I. THE FEAR OF EVIL IS THE ELEMENT OF IT WITH WHICH MAN HAS MOST DIRECTLY TO DO. Man is a being "looking before and after." Apprehension and memory furnish together pretty well the whole of our bitter experience in life. The fear of evil is not an animal, it is strictly a human experience; part of the endowment of our race. II. IT IS PRECISELY THIS FEAR OF EVIL WHICH, BY GOD'S HELP, WE ARE TO CONQUER; THE EVIL ITSELF IS WHOLLY BEYOND OUR POWER. Calamity haunts the evil air of an evil world, and man catches the infection. He lives fearfully, and faces death fearfully, till he has learnt the Divine secret. III. HOW IS THE POWER TO BE WON? 1. By realising how purely independent of things is man's peace and happiness. 2. By taking a true measure of the range of our being and its resources. 3. By perfect filial trust in God. We want a heart,

an arm to rest on. The only perfect rest is in God. This sense of the Divine love, the clasp of the everlasting arms, is exquisite and blessed rest. (*Baldwin Brown, B.A.*) *The blessedness of hearkening to the voice of heavenly wisdom:*—To hearken means not only to hear, but to hear with attention, so as to follow the advice given (Jas. i. 25); or, as the Saviour says (John x. 27). Such hear, not to forget, but to treasure up in their memories, that they may reduce to practice what they hear: such hear, not to cavil and find fault, but that they may profit by the instruction they receive. Now, this attention is assuredly the work of the Spirit on the heart, as we read of Lydia (Acts xvi. 14). And hence it behoves all, when hearing God's Word, to lift up their hearts to Him, that it may be with profit to their souls. And what are the promises made to such hearers? Safe dwelling and quietness from fear of evil. The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, operating on the heart, brings solid and lasting peace. The first of these promises is beautifully illustrated by our blessed Lord Himself at the close of His sermon on the mount (Matt. vii. 24-27). The man who hears Christian instruction, and who satisfies himself with listening and approving, but goes no further, never casts away his sins, or really lays hold on Christ, may flatter himself that all is right with his soul, because he has feelings and convictions and desires of a spiritual nature; but such a man's religion will break down entirely under the first flood of tribulation, and fail him completely when his need is the sorest, whereas the man who hears Christian instruction, and practises what he hears, upon such a man the floods of sickness, sorrow, poverty, disappointments, bereavements may beat, but his soul is unmoved, his faith does not give way, his comforts do not forsake him. Not only, however, is safety promised to him who hearkeneth to the voice of heavenly wisdom, but such an assurance of it as shall remove every distressing fear. Not only quietness from evil, but from the fear of it. Men in general suffer much more from fear of evils which they expect may come upon them than from those which they actually have to undergo; but God "keeps him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Him." A wicked man is terrified with imagined danger; a godly man is not afraid even when the danger is real; for the one has a witness for him in his own breast, whereas the other carries within a witness against himself; and this witness is a judge to condemn him, yea, an executioner to torment and vex him. To be freed from the fear of evil is, in truth, the perfection of a spiritual state; and a great part of the saint's portion both on earth and in heaven lies in the deliverance and security from it. But it may be asked, To whom are these gracious promises made? They are made to all: high and low, rich and poor, old and young. The term used is as large as any can desire: "Whoso hearkeneth." Let them only listen to Christ's invitation in the gospel, and render obedience to His commands, and the promised blessings shall be vouchsafed to them. (*T. Grantham.*)

CHAPTER II.

VER. 1-5. So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom.—*Wisdom:*—This is constantly connected with religion. A religious fear of God is the first step in true wisdom. He who would know God aright must love Wisdom and humbly and vigorously seek after her. Wisdom is spoken of as a virtue, as much as truthfulness or charity or sobriety. It is identified with goodness. There is a real, true sense in which wisdom may be put for religion: the God-fearing man is the wise man; without the fear of God it is impossible to call any man truly wise. Taking the lowest view of things, only a selfish view, looking only at what is to be gained, the religious man is a wise man. If the good man proves to have been wrong, he loses nothing in the end, for he has had his own happiness here—peace of mind, a quiet conscience, and good prospects for the future. To take a higher view of the subject. The religious man is concerned with far grander and more exalted things than any other man. The principal attribute of a wise, discerning man is to be able to see things as they really are, to pierce through outside appearances and get at the heart of things, and not be cheated by sham outsides. To do this is a sign of wisdom. The religion of Jesus Christ treats of such mighty concerns that it is impossible to give the name of wise to him who thinks lightly of it. Wisdom is something which must be laboured for; it is not to be sought merely for amuse-

ment, but the search is to be the very business of man's life. (*H. Goodwin, M.A.*) *The endeavour to obtain true wisdom*:—The wise man is now come to the top of the ladder which doth bring us to true wisdom. The lowest step was a docile heart (ver. 1). The next, human instruction (ver. 2). The next above that, prayer to God (ver. 3). The last, study and painful endeavour through God's blessing to obtain it (ver. 4). We must not lie in a ditch and cry, "God, help!" We must not so trust to our prayers that we give over our endeavours. I. HEAVENLY WISDOM IS OF GREAT PRICE. II. HEAVENLY WISDOM IS FAR REMOTE AND HIDDEN FROM US. It is beyond our invention and beyond our apprehension. III. WE MUST SEARCH FOR THE MEANS OF OBTAINING HEAVENLY WISDOM. IV. WE MUST USE THE MEANS WHEN WE FIND THEM. (*Francis Taylor.*) *The true wisdom*:—I. THE NATURE OF TRUE WISDOM. It is different from what the world calls wisdom. Its nature is different; its object and end are different. It is such a knowledge as is connected with the fear of God and obedience to His will. Worldly wisdom may be of use in directing us in those things which concern the present life, but spiritual wisdom will direct us in those things which concern the life to come. II. THE MEANS WHICH ARE TO BE USED FOR OBTAINING WISDOM. III. IF THE MEANS ARE USED, SUCCESS WILL CERTAINLY FOLLOW. Worldly wisdom is too often connected with pride; spiritual wisdom is always accompanied by humility. IV. THE SOURCE TO WHICH WE MUST EVER ASCRIBE THAT SUCCESS. God and God alone is the author of it. The teaching of this passage may be summed up thus—1. There is a wisdom which man does not naturally possess, yet without which no man can be happy. 2. This wisdom consists not in the depths of science and learning, but in the fear of the Lord. 3. This wisdom is the gift of God. 4. It may be obtained by every one who desires it and diligently seeks for it in the way which God has appointed. (*J. S. Pratt, B.C.L.*) *Rules for the attainment of wisdom*:—I. THERE MUST BE AN ACTIVE, PRACTICAL HABIT OF ATTENTION. Earthly wisdom is gained by study; heavenly wisdom by prayer. Prayer puts the heart under a heavenly tutorage. II. PRAYER MUST NOT STAND IN THE STEAD OF DILIGENCE. Let it rather give energy to it. The miner's indefatigable pains, his invincible resolution, his untiring perseverance. The rule of success is: Dig up and down the field, and if the search be discouraging, dig again. The patient industry of perusal and reperusal will open the embosomed treasure. The habit of living in the element of Scripture is invaluable. Yet this profit can only be fully reaped in retirement. To search the Scriptures we must be alone with God. This enriching study gives a purer vein of sound judgment. All fundamental errors and heresies in the Church may be traced to partial and disjointed statements of truth. Truth separated from truth becomes error. But the mind prayerfully occupied in search of Divine truth—"crying and lifting up the voice"—will never fail to discern the two great principles of godliness, the "fear and knowledge of God." There is no peradventure nor disappointment in this search. Never has apostasy from the faith been connected with a prayerful and diligent study of the Word of God. (*C. Bridges.*) *The inquiry after Divine truth*:—I. IT MUST BE CANDID—SINCERE. It is said of "fools" that they "despise wisdom and instruction." But the children of Wisdom "receive" her words. They give them what they are entitled to, a serious and deliberate attention. They listen, they remember, they meditate, they examine, they accept, they lay up for use. If you feel the value of your privilege in having the Word of God in your possession, you will attend to the instructions and counsels, the admonitions, the encouragements, the commands which in the Bible are set before you. There are some who refuse to hear at all. This is unreasonable, uncandid, unmanly, and most infatuated. There are some who only seem to hear; the spirit of assentation has in it no sincerity, no heart. When there is sincerity of heart you will "hide with you" the Divine counsels and commands; hide the contents of the Word in the memory, in the understanding, in the conscience, in the heart. II. IT MUST BE EARNEST. An inquiry determined on gratification, and that spares no pains on its attainment. Divine Wisdom is in earnest in imparting her instructions, and the pupil should be in earnest in seeking her instructions. He who is sensible of his inability to guide himself in the perplexing paths of life will be all solicitude for a conductor, a Divine guide who may bring him into the right way and keep him in it. III. WITH EARNESTNESS MUST BE UNITED IMPORTUNE PERSEVERANCE. This is implied in the variety of expressions used in succession to each other. Men discover the value they set on the treasures of this world by their unrelaxing diligence in seeking them. They do not give up the search immediately because they do not immediately succeed. Divine knowledge is fitly compared to treasure. The comparison

WORLDLY vs.
godly wisdom

is natural and common. But how few even of the people of God who profess to have learned the value of this wisdom and knowledge by a happy experience discover the longing, the vehement and persevering research, for the attainment of a larger and larger amount of it which might be expected of them! There is no way in which the Word can "be" in us richly without an eager seeking after it, or "dwell" in us richly without a careful and jealous keeping of it. There are powerful spiritual inducements presented. "Then thou shalt understand the fear of the Lord," &c. By these terms true religion is expressed. Knowledge of God is the first lesson of heavenly wisdom. On the right apprehension of this lesson all the rest necessarily depends—

"You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him."

Wrong views of God will vitiate every other department of your knowledge. The "fear of the Lord," founded in the knowledge of Him, is something to the right understanding of which experience is indispensable. IV. THE SOURCE FROM WHICH TRUE WISDOM IS TO BE OBTAINED. "The Lord giveth wisdom." In two ways—by His Word and by His Spirit. These two are really one, for God neither gives wisdom by His Word without His Spirit nor by His Spirit without His Word. The word rendered "sound wisdom" is one of general import, signifying anything real, solid, substantial. God has stores of wisdom laid up for present use; He will ever give larger and clearer manifestations of Himself, of His truths, of His ways, and of His will out of His inexhaustible stores, and there is also a treasure of invaluable wisdom and knowledge in reserve for His people in a future and better world. Another promise is safety. "A buckler to them that walk uprightly." Jehovah is security amidst all the assaults of the enemies of the upright, and especially amidst "the fiery darts of the wicked one," which, when the shield of Jehovah's power is interposed, cannot touch him, but fall, quenched and pointless, to the ground. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.) *The promises of Wisdom*:—Man must listen to Wisdom if he would be wise; his attitude must be one of attention; he must turn his ear towards the heavens and listen for every whisper that may proceed from the skies, and whilst his ear is listening his heart must be applied with unbroken attention to understanding. Everything depends upon our spirit as to the results of our study in the school of Wisdom. The "crying after knowledge and lifting up the voice for understanding" are equivalent to an exercise in prayer. There must also be activity or energy of the intensest quality. Seeking as for silver is an allusion to mining. The remains of copper mines have been discovered in the peninsula of Sinai and the remains of gold mines in one part of the desert of Egypt. Wisdom does not lie on the surface. It is to be dug for. Searching as for hid treasure reminds of the insecurity of property in the East and its frequent burial. God has purposely hidden both wisdom and understanding in order that the energy of man might be developed in searching for them. Wisdom is hidden in ancient books; in the experience of the whole world; in all difficult places; and is to be sought for with perseverance and zeal; the very act of searching being accompanied by a blessing. The Lord alone can give wisdom. He is the one fountain of wisdom. Elsewhere are partial revelations, broken experiences, hints of meaning, temporary satisfactions, but until we have discovered the Lord, and set Him always before us, we shall be working without a centre. True religion comes before true philosophy. Righteousness of character is necessary to the enjoyment of the treasures of sound wisdom. By "sound wisdom" we are to understand furtherance or advancement. God is evermore on the side of those who are righteous or upright or holy. Wisdom enters into the heart, and thus keeps the whole life pure. Knowledge is not merely an acquisition, it becomes a real pleasure to the soul, and not until it has become such a pleasure are we really in possession of it. Discretion and understanding are represented as the keepers of the soul—its protectors and guides—saving the soul from the way of the evil man, and protecting it from the man who delights in froward things, literally, in the misrepresentation and distortion of the truth. (J. Parker, D.D.) *Spiritual excellence*:—I. SPIRITUAL EXCELLENCE DESCRIBED. It is "the fear of the Lord" and the "knowledge of God." Godliness has to do with both the intellect and the heart. It is knowledge and fear. In true spiritual excellence there is a blending of reverent love and theologic light—such a blending that both become one; the love is light and the light is love. This is not the means to heaven, it is heaven—in all times, circumstances, and worlds.

II. SPIRITUAL EXCELLENCE ATTAINED. 1. By the reception of Divine truth. The receptive faculty must be employed. 2. By the retention of Divine truth. What we receive from the Divine mind we must hold fast. 3. By the search after Divine truth. The ear must be turned away from the sounds of earthly pleasure, the din of worldliness, and the voices of human speculation, and must listen attentively to communications from the spiritual and eternal. 4. The search must be earnest and persevering. By so much as spiritual excellence is more valuable than all worldly treasures should be our ardent, unwearied diligence in quest of it. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 3. Yea, if thou criest after knowledge.—*All knowledge is good*:—No kind of knowledge is to be despised. The bee gathers honey from every flower. What shore so bleak, what moor so barren, what rocks so naked from which we may not carry home some interesting object, in the shape of plant or mineral? So there are no circumstances in which we are placed, or persons, the humblest, with whom we can associate, without learning something we did not know before; something of value which, while interesting, may not one day prove useful, an example of the familiar proverb, "Keep a thing for seven years, and you will find the use of it." (T. Guthrie, D.D.) *Earnest seeking for virtues*:—A man has lost a title-deed, or some paper that would decide a suit in his favour rather than against him. And with what alacrity does he search for it! How does he go through the house in quest of it! "My dear, have you seen that roll of paper with a great red seal on it?" "What was it? A newspaper?" "No, no! not a newspaper. I shall lose a suit if I cannot find it." And she searches in every drawer and every trunk, and every closet, and even under the carpets. Both of them search night and day, going over the same place twenty times, saying, "Maybe I did not look thoroughly." And they cannot give it up. The man almost cries, he wants it so much. He will have it, so much depends upon it. And at last he finds it, and he says, "I would rather have had my house burned than not to have found this paper." Now, when men search for victorious virtues in their souls as they would search for an important legal document, do you suppose they will be saying, "Perhaps others may be able to live a good Christian life, but I cannot"? You can. And when you want true religion, when your soul hungers for it, you will find it. (H. W. Beecher.)

Ver. 4. Seekest her as silver.—*Search for hid treasures*:—Even in Job, the oldest book in the world, we read that the bitter in soul dig for death more earnestly than for hid treasures (Job iii. 21). There is not another comparison within the whole compass of human actions so vivid as this. I have heard of diggers actually fainting when they have come even upon a single coin. They become positively frantic, digging all night with desperate earnestness, and continue to work till utterly exhausted. There are, at this hour, hundreds of persons thus engaged all over the country. Not a few spend their last farthing in these ruinous efforts. I heard a respectable man in Sidon declare that if he had been one of those fortunate diggers in the garden he would have killed all the rest and fled with the treasure out of the country. These operations are carried on with the utmost secrecy, accompanied with charms and incantations against the jan and other spirits which are said to keep guard over hid treasures. The belief in the existence of these guards, and of their dangerous character, is just as prevalent now as in the time of the Thousand Nights. Intelligent and respectable people have assured me that they have come upon slabs of stone, closing up doors to secret chambers, which no power on earth could remove, because the proper password or charm is lost. Others soberly assert that they have been driven away by terrible jan, who threatened them with instant death if they attempted to force the doors. The secret deposits are always found by accident. (W. M. Thomson, D.D.) *The great life-quest*:—Wisdom, or the intellectual adoption of good and pious principles, and the practical application of such principles to the ordering of life and conduct and relations, is personified. The writer has dealt with Wisdom's call to the young, and with her warning to the negligent; now he presents her instructions to those who show a disposition to give heed to her. She addresses those who take a serious view of life. Life is, for every man, full of sublime possibilities. There must be some great life-quest, something that we should live to seek, something that we may hope to win. **I. WHAT DOES IT SEEM TO BE?** It is called "knowledge," "understanding," "wisdom." The desire to know was never

more absorbing. The pursuit of knowledge never seemed more encouraging. Facilities for the search never so abounded. Rewards for those who attain never were so rich. And yet the grave mysteries of life never so thickened and darkened round the human spirit as they do to-day. The pursuit of knowledge can never stop with things, it must concern itself with moral questions. Since the time of Bacon there has grown up an extravagant demand for the sense-verification of everything. Man's supreme question is: "Good, what is it? Where is it? How can it be attained?" Appeal: You would know as books can teach; as science-leaders can teach; as experience can teach. But none of them, nor all together, will ever satisfy you. You must know as God, and God alone, can teach you. II. WHAT DOES IT PROVE TO BE? The knowledge and fear of God. If a man's quest be sincere and thoroughly earnest, it leads to that; it cannot rest short of that. 1. A life-quest may not be carried far enough. It may stop at what only seems to be. 2. A life-quest may be turned aside. "Ye did run well, who did hinder you?" Young souls may be attracted aside by worldly pleasure; driven aside by worldly cares; or cast aside by false teachings. "Then shall ye know, if ye follow on to know the Lord." When you have found what is the chief good for the sons of men, follow it on, through riches, learning, pleasure, still unresting, ever unresting, until the soul is led to the feet of Jesus, and finds in Him the true knowledge and the true fear of God. (*Weekly Pulpit.*) *Seek, and ye shall find*:—The matter of this whole passage consists in a command to seek and a promise to bestow. A father speaks, and he speaks to children. He demands a reasonable service, and promises a rich reward. In the fourfold repetition of the command there seems an order of succession. I. "RECEIVE MY WORDS." Practical instruction begins here. The basis of all religion and morality is the Word of the Lord, taken into the understanding and the heart. The Word of God is a vital seed, but it will not germinate unless it be hidden in a softened, receptive heart. The place and use of providential visitation in the Divine administration of Christ's kingdom is to break up the way of the Word through the incrustations of worldliness and vanity that encase a human heart, and keep the Word lying hard and dry upon the surface. II. "INCLINE THINE EAR." The entrance of the Word has an immediate effect on the attitude of the mind and the source of the life. The incoming of the Word makes the ear incline to wisdom; and the inclining of the ear to wisdom lets in and lays up greater treasures of the Word. Those who hide the Word in their hearts acquire a habitual bent of mind toward things spiritual. The great obstacle to the power and spread of the gospel lies in the averted attitude of human hearts. A man inclines his ear to those sounds which already his heart desires. To turn the ear to the word of wisdom by an exercise of will, is the very way to inoculate the heart with a love to that word passing the love of earthly things. The ear inclined to Divine wisdom will draw the heart; the heart drawn will incline the ear. III. "CRY AFTER KNOWLEDGE." This represents the bent heavenward of the heart at a more advanced stage. The longing for God's salvation, already begotten in the heart, bursts forth now into an irrepressible cry. Men may be offended with the fervour of an earnest soul, God never. Compression will only increase the strength of the emotion struggling within. IV. "SEEK HER AS SILVER." Another and a higher step. The last was the earnest cry; this is the persevering endeavour. Fervent prayer must be tested by persevering pains. "Strive to enter in." The search of wisdom is compared to another search with which we are more familiar. The zeal of mammon's worshippers rebukes the servants of the living God. We are invited to take a leaf from the book of the fortune-seeker. Will not the far-reaching plans, and heroic sacrifices, and long-enduring toil of Californian and Australian gold-diggers rise up and condemn us who have tasted and known the grace of God? Two things are required in our search—the right direction and the sufficient impulse. Those who seek thus shall not seek in vain. None fail who seek according to the prescription of the Word, and after the example of the world. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Meditation in searching*:—Solomon, speaking of knowledge and understanding, bids us to "search for her as for hidden treasure." You know jewels do not lie upon the surface of the ground, but they are hid in the receptacles of the earth; you must dig for them before you can enjoy them. Truth is *in profundo*, and our understandings are dark. He that rides post through a country is never able to make a full description of it; and he that takes but a transitory view of the truths of the gospel will never come to the full knowledge of them. "This meditation makes them appear to our eye in their beauty and lustre. (*H. G. Salter.*)

A penetrating search.—Some years ago the scientific world was startled by the announcement that far down in the abyss of waters, below the seeming limits of life and light, a new world of animal organisms had existence. Fish and mollusc, sponge and coral were there, though man had vainly imagined no living creature could be found. He had not dredged deep enough. A longer line brought new wonders to light. And so with the Scriptures. They can never be exhausted. It is we who fail to search, and searching, never find. (*W. H. Groser.*)

Ver. 5. Find the knowledge of God.—*The benefits of religion*.—Religion, whether natural or revealed, has always the same beneficial influence on the mind. In youth, in health and prosperity, it awakens feelings of gratitude and sublime love, and purifies at the same time that which it exalts; but it is in misfortune, in sickness, in age, that its effects are more truly and beneficially felt; when submission is cherished in faith and humble trust in the Divine will, when duties become pleasures, undecaying sources of consolation, then it creates powers which were believed to be extinct, and gives a freshness to the mind which was supposed to have passed away for ever, but which is now renovated as an immortal hope. Its influence outlives all earthly enjoyments, and becomes stronger as the organs decay and the frame dissolves; it appears as that evening star of light in the horizon of life which we are sure is to become, in another season, a morning star, and to throw its radiance through the gloom and shadow of death. (*Sir Humphrey Davey.*) *Knowledge of God the result of revelation*.—I do not look to the Bible to teach me what I or my successors may some day find out by the use of observations and the inductive faculties; I go to the Bible to learn what I cannot find out for myself. Apart from revelation, what do I know about the world to come, about anything but what I can touch, taste, and handle? What hope have I for the future if I look only to nature? Nature tells me that when I die I shall probably be just like the dog, or horse, or any other animal. "All immortal, none immortal," she seems to say. Therefore I must get light from revelation. I must even look to revelation for the motives which influence conduct, for personally I am not satisfied with these systems of ethics that are founded on utilitarian motives. I do not see how I can be said to have knowledge of God unless He in some way reveal Himself to me. (*Prof. Bonney.*)

Ver. 6. For the Lord giveth wisdom.—*The fountain of wisdom*.—I. THAT GOD IS THE ONLY FOUNTAIN OF ALL TRUE WISDOM. Men say that the Deity is not the only source of it, but that much of it may be attained by a converse with beings most opposite to Him, even with wicked and reprobate spirits. Such were the oracles and gods of the Gentiles, which the wisest men among them, not excepting Socrates himself, consulted, to learn of them how to set about and manage their most weighty affairs. Their mistake arises from their confounding the notions of wisdom and of craft. A wise man cannot maintain his character without doing always that which is just and right. Nobody shall ever be able to persuade him that an ill thing can be a real benefit, or the part of a wise man or a true friend. A cunning and crafty man lays this down to himself for a general rule, that by all means whatsoever he must gain his point, and come at the end which he aims at. In his pursuit of it he will proceed in the path of righteousness if that leads him most directly and easily to it. But when truth is on the opposite side he first bespatters it with all imaginable defamations, and then strikes at it furiously in the disguise in which he has put it. The difference between the wise and cunning man is this: the wise man studies to be thoroughly and substantially good; the cunning man contents himself with the shadow and appearance of goodness. And this confirms the conclusion that God alone is the fountain of all true wisdom. II. THE ONLY WAY TO DRAW WISDOM OUT OF THIS FOUNTAIN IS BY STUDYING AND PRACTISING THE SACRED ORACLES OF GOD. 1. How does it appear that the books which are called the Word of God contain the precepts of sound wisdom? How can those books which are styled the Divine Word contain such wise directions as lead men to happiness? It is in the power of every man to be happy who governs himself by the directions of the Word of God, because that teaches him to possess his soul in patience, trusting in God, whose command he obeys, that He will lead him in the right way. 2. Does not this Word of God enjoin men in certain cases to suffer things very grievous to flesh and blood? It does, and yet these proverbs of Solomon, which seldom carry our views beyond this life, do vehemently inculcate upon us a strict adherence to the rules of piety and

virtue, as what will most effectually conduce to our present welfare, let the chances and accidents of our condition be what they will. The sacred maxims are most beneficial, both for public government and private life, without respect had to anything hereafter. Let us take the royal preacher's word for it, that this science of Divine wisdom requires very intense and serious application of mind thoroughly to apprehend it. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *Religion and the cultivation of the intellect* :—It is a serious evil if the best trained minds of the community are either hostile or indifferent to the claims of God. Students are placed in peculiar peril in respect of religion. There is a prevalent notion amongst half-educated people that the highest culture of the mind tends to the destruction of the religious spirit. There is now an antagonism between the school which prides itself upon its rationalism and the school which is equally entrenched in its strong faith. The habits of student life are not altogether helpful to the preservation of religious character. The studies, companions, work, and recreation, often operate injuriously upon the spiritual tone of men. Many, in the course of their study, have lost their faith. I. RELIGION IN RELATION TO THE ENDS OF STUDY. There are specific subjects of study bearing direct relation to a man's life-work. But the real object of study is to discipline the powers and to strengthen the mind. Study which is intended to increase knowledge and to gather facts begins when student life ceases. The best student is the man who "is" most, not the man who has learned most. The highest ideal of study must be that which secures, or at least aims at securing, thoroughness of discipline and wholeness of view. Perfection, as the harmonious and free working of all parts and powers of the mind, must be the goal to which the student tends. To learn everything is not given to man, but to be his best self in everything which he can be, this is his privilege. It is here that the subject of religion comes to be considered by the student. The nature which he possesses is distinctly religious. If a man does not attend to that faculty whereby he regards God, he neglects that part of himself which is most important and influential. No man can afford to pass lightly by the claims upon him which are put forth by religion. The religious nature must be disciplined and cultured if we are to lay claim to wholeness of being. See the influence which religion has exerted upon our human life and history. Eliminate religion from the story of the world and what is left? Critics charge religion with being a hindrance to human progress. But this is the common logical fallacy of putting the universal in place of the particular. Certain forms of religious polity may have done so, but not religion. Religion has, more than aught else, aided man in his long and weary pilgrimage of progress. Religion cannot be easily set aside by those who are engaged in the cultivation of the mind. All men are dealing with religious topics. The most striking instance is to be found in the modern teachers of science. Scarcely a single man of science of any repute but deals with these all-absorbing points of human thought, and indeed cannot help himself. Religion is human. II. RELIGION AS AN INFLUENCE OF DEEP AND FAR-REACHING POWER. The student cannot do his work as a common man. Intellectual cultivation is, as a rule, associated with moral refinement. The destruction of entire nature may be seen among students. This is generally preceded by neglect of the religious side of their nature—faith undermined either by the operations of intellectual doubt, or else still more seriously assailed by the numbing influences of sinful habits, but all proceeding in the first instance from the neglect of practical religion, the duties of prayer, and communion with the Unseen. 1. Religion renders the student reverent. Nothing is so unsuitable to the man who desires a cultivated mind as arrogance and self-esteem. All wisdom is humble. Reverence has been the mark of the profound and patient investigators of nature in all ages. Religion and its duties produce reverence. 2. Religion secures inward harmony of the powers. Man cannot gain intellectual vigour when his whole being is torn asunder by conflicting forces. Outward physical quietness is the necessary condition of study. Inward spiritual peace is as necessary. Religion will give this. Coming into proper relation to God, we find everything else in its place. To return to God is to return to the balance of our life. The religious life is only sustained by the knowledge of Him who is the express image of the Father, and the shining ray of the central light of God. Christ's religion is the religion of intelligence. (*Llewelyn D. Bevan, D.D.*) *The Lord giveth wisdom* :—I. AS TO THE EXCELLENCY OF SCRIPTURE WISDOM; that surely may be accounted such which enlightens the understanding with the noblest and most blessed truth, and directs the will to the choice of the greatest good. And these being truths concerning the first, and best, and most excellent of Beings, are

best suited to enlighten and improve, to raise and enlarge, the understanding of a reasonable creature; and being truths which have the fullest and clearest evidence as declared by God Himself, the God of truth, are best suited to satisfy a mind desirous of true knowledge. II. HOW, AND TO WHAT MANNER OF PERSONS, THIS WISDOM OF GOD IS GIVEN. 1. Now, the manner in which God gives us this wisdom is by His Holy Spirit, the Enlightener and Sanctifier of the Church, by an outward and inward teaching. (1) Outwardly He teaches us by giving a rule of faith and practice in things pertaining to God for the salvation of our souls. God also instructs us outwardly by the ministry of His Church, and the example of holy men and women. (2) But these outward instructions and motives not being able of themselves to inspire us with religious wisdom, God is graciously pleased to teach us inwardly, also, by His Holy Spirit. 2. It remains to be inquired to whom God giveth this heavenly wisdom. (1) To the humble attendant upon His Word. (2) To the true believer of His Word. (3) To the sincere practiser of His Word. A good life is the best key to Scripture. (*T. Tamson, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous.—Good men and their God:—I. THE CHARACTER OF GOOD MEN. 1. They are spoken of as the "righteous."

The moral code of the universe may be reduced to two words: "Be just." Be just to yourselves, to others, and to God. Virtue, morality, and religion constitute a righteous man. 2. They are spoken of as "walking uprightly." Goodness in all moral creatures is not stationary, but progressive. 3. They are spoken of as "saints." They are consecrated to God's service, set apart to His use; they are the living and imperishable temples of the Holy Ghost. II. THE GOD OF GOOD MEN.

1. His relation to creation generally. He is the great original, central, exhaustless fountain of intelligence. The "Father of lights"—the light of instinct, reason, genius, conscience. Wherever there is a ray of truth, a beam of intelligence, a gleam of virtue, there is God, and in them He should be recognised and worshipped.

2. His relation to the good in particular. He makes special provision for them. He provides for their instruction. He is their buckler, their shield, and their enemies must strike through Him to injure them. He superintends their career. He vouchsafes their ultimate perfection. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Importance of wisdom:—Not more necessary are constant supplies of water to the growth of vegetation in the sultry regions of the East than the influence of Divine truth to the existence of human happiness. If a tree, planted by the margin of a refreshing river, is proof against the heat of the sun or the unfavourableness of the seasons, he also who, into a well-prepared heart, receives continual infusions of religious wisdom, is flourishing and happy amidst all the inconveniences of life. (*Bp. Jebb.*)

A buckler to them that walk uprightly.—God the safeguard of wisdom:—We are all keepers of our own goodness and wisdom. God therefore is pleased to lay it up for us, and that it may be safe, Himself is the buckler and safeguard of it. But it must be sound and real wisdom and goodness, or else He careth not for it. The word translated "sound wisdom" signifieth essence or being; but it is used also to signify virtue, wisdom, and the law of God, because other things pass away, but they have a durable being—they make the well-being of man, they support the being of all things that are. As a buckler taketh the blows on itself which are directed to another, so God taketh the wrongs done to the righteous as done to Himself, and so doth receive them, as that He taketh away the hurt from His servants. The buckler also shows that they who will live uprightly must strive and fight. Let every one resist the enemy valiantly, for he that resisteth shall have an unwearied helper, and triumphing shall not want a bountiful rewarder. God will defend and preserve those that walk uprightly from falling into errors in seeking for wisdom. It is from God, by fearing Him, that wisdom is obtained, and that wisdom so obtained is alone sound wisdom. The paths of judgment God will keep for Himself, the ways of holiness He will preserve for His saints; and He preserving the ways of holiness, the ways will preserve them that walk in them. The words may, however, mean, He will so keep judgment that He will preserve mercy; He will so preserve mercy that He will keep judgment. The ways cross not so much in themselves but that they can meet in Him. Note that they are but paths, narrow paths of judgment, which the Lord keepeth, but it is a broad way of mercy which He preserveth. The force of ver. 8 is that God, who is Himself exact righteousness, guideth His servants in the ways of righteousness. The word "understanding" may seem to be derived from standing, according as the Greek word also hath its derivation. Clemens Alexandrinus giveth the reason of the

derivation, because understanding doth stay and settle the mind, which, before being unresolved, was carried hither and thither. But though this be true of a natural understanding, yet a spiritual understanding doth rather consist in walking the paths that lead from earthly things to heavenly. To understand righteousness is from a civil righteousness to walk to a religious righteousness. (*M. Jermin.*)

Ver. 11. Discretion shall preserve thee.—Humility :—This is the first sought and last won of the Christian graces. Such are the difficulties in the acquisition of humility that it is but seldom really found. It is a common want of the present day. See the ordinary courtesy of modern society. See the special snare in intellectual careers. In both of these provinces of life especial discouragement has been given during the recent period to the growth in us of true humility. **I. ABJECTNESS IS NOT HUMILITY.** Depression, abasement, humiliation, by no means exhaust all the commutation of this well-known Christian term. Abjectness and humility may have some features in common. But humility presupposes a soaring spirit. The calm dignity of Christian holiness must rest behind. This lovely grace assists and furthers genuine aspirations. Our Lord made three contributions to the science of ethics, and each of them bore the impress of the Cross—humility, faith, love. These, at least, He lifted into places of high importance. Our Lord places humility in the very front of His teaching. See sermons on the mount and on the plain. There is nothing vain or false in humility. "Humility is the hall-mark of wisdom." **II. THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMILITY MUST BE MADE IN CAREFUL SELF-REPRESSION.** We are so much bound up with ourselves that we cannot come to a just and fair estimate of our own affairs without rejecting a vast amount of the suggestions and insinuations that we make to ourselves. Self-abnegation may, in becoming habitual, cast off all consciousness. Repentance must begin with humiliation. There can be no contrition without humility. The difficulty is to get this feeling the permanent posture of the soul. Here we must depend upon the action of conscience. The following are some of the provinces in which we have to exercise self-repression. 1. Good-fortune, successes, advancement, commendation, praise, bring a too satisfied sense of our own exaltation. 2. Success is said to try humility, misfortune to produce it. "We can hardly learn humility and tenderness enough except by suffering." 3. Think of the wrath, quarrels, and resentments which arise from nervous anxiety about ourselves and our position. Bishop Wilson says, "He that is truly humble never thinks himself wronged." 4. Humility often seems persistently to fly away from the intellectual life. **III. HUMILITY REQUIRES US TO FIX OUR ATTENTIONS UPON PEOPLE AND THINGS OUTSIDE OF OURSELVES.** This includes a steady posture of reverence. The reverent life confers grace and refinement upon our characters. It constitutes the inextinguishable charm of religion. In the practice of the reverent life we have the conscious cultivation of humility. We move out of self-contemplation and self-pleasing into the higher region of sacrifice, and into the dignity of giving, in offering homage to the Almighty God, and in according attention to other people. **IV. HUMILITY IS REGULATED BY OUR DEPORTMENT TOWARDS TRUTH.** True humility is marked by a simplicity of mind from which self is banished. Disorderly introspection is morbid and unwholesome. But humility is difficult to attain. It is scarcely possible until the character is thoroughly settled to avoid an amount of self-consciousness which is inconsistent with real humility. There is indeed much intellectual as well as moral weakness that stands in the way of acquiring humility. Besides the want of the power of concentration, there is generally a lack of imagination. See illustration in our Lord's life of humility with aspiration in it. 1. The lofty aspirations and the soaring aims of our Lord were never laid aside by Him, but they were kept in the background. 2. With what consistency did He repress Himself, and how thoroughly His teaching coincided with His example! 3. He showed reverence towards all. His respect for men is most touching. 4. What self-sacrifice and neglect of self are visible throughout His career! No labour is ever too much for Him. He was always ready at the call of duty. Does the way of humility still seem hard? There, on that hill outside Jerusalem, at the foot of that Cross which is set up towards heaven, drawing all men unto it, we may come to learn what we can learn nowhere else—how to lower our pride, and to foster humility in our souls. (*Edward Miller, M.A.*) *The negative beneficial influence of religion :—*There is an important distinction between the understanding of the meaning of Divine discoveries and the perception of their excellence and truth. Knowledge in Scripture, with which salvation is connected, includes the

latter. The knowledge of anything means the knowledge of its real and distinctive properties. The apostle speaks of "spiritual discernment," "Discretion" and "understanding" in this connection mean self-jealousy arising from self-knowledge. The knowledge of ourselves includes the knowledge, theoretical and experimental, of the unlimited deceitfulness of our own hearts. And this, connected with a right knowledge of the sources of temptation as they exist in such abundance and variety around us, will inspire and maintain discretion. He will "watch unto prayer," and not merely trust to his own discretion. Diffidence of self and confidence in God constitute the discretion of the spiritual man. The two sources of temptation for youth are wicked men and wicked women. The "evil man" speaketh froward things, *i.e.*, words of perverse rebellion, of a spirit stubborn, refractory, scornful, self-willed. These work seductively on youthful minds of a particular temperament; especially on those who have a craze for independence. The "evil man's" ways are crooked ways, changing from purpose at wayward inclination. The "strange woman" represents all seducers to immorality and sensual indulgences, and such have a special influence on youth. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The youth assisted in forming his religious sentiments*.—I. LET YOUR MIND BE IMPRESSED WITH THIS SENTIMENT, THAT THERE IS SUCH A THING AS RELIGION; AND THAT IT IS OF SERIOUS IMPORTANCE. II. ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT RELIGION IS AGREEABLE TO THE NATURE OF GOD. As it is a service which you owe to Him, your ideas of it must correspond with His moral character. III. TO JUDGE WHAT RELIGION IS, YOU MUST ALWAYS CONSIDER THAT IT IS A RATIONAL THING. IV. RELIGION MUST BE A WORK SUITED TO THE NATURE AND CONDITION OF MAN. V. YOU MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT RELIGION IS A BENEVOLENT AND USEFUL THING; AND THAT, WHEREVER IT TAKES PLACE, IT MAKES MEN BETTER THAN THEY WERE BEFORE. VI. JUDGE OF THINGS DOUBTFUL BY THINGS WHICH ARE PLAIN. VII. IF A MATTER PROPOSED TO YOU, IN A WAY OF INSTRUCTION OR ADVICE, APPEARS DOUBTFUL, SUSPEND YOUR RESOLUTION, UNTIL YOU HAVE MADE FURTHER INQUIRY. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. To deliver thee from the way of the evil man.—*Wickedness and wisdom, the bane and the antidote*.—I. A TERRIBLE DESCRIPTION OF WICKED PERSONS. 1. Their character. Their speech is corrupt. Their habit is corrupt. Their heart is corrupt. Their influence is corrupt. 2. Their peril. The spell of lust palsies the grasp of her victims. Everything dies under the influence of wickedness—self-respect, spiritual sensibility, mental freedom, the freshness, the vigour, and the beauty of life. 3. Their doom. They are rooted out from the esteem of the good, from the sphere of improvement, from the realm of mercy, and from the domain of hope. II. THE ANTIDOTE. Wickedness is terribly powerful, but wisdom is mightier. Its mightiness in man, however, depends upon its right reception. 1. Wisdom guards the innocent. The way to keep out evil is to fill the soul with goodness. 2. It delivers the fallen. Heavenly wisdom in the soul is the only soul-redemptive force. 3. It guides the redeemed. Like the star to the mariner, if this wisdom shine within us it will guide us safely over the voyage of life. (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *The influence of associates*.—The tree frog acquires the colour of whatever it adheres to for a short time. If it be found on the oak, it is a brown colour; on the sycamore or cedar, he is of a whitish brown colour; but when found on the growing corn, he is sure to be green. Just so it is with young men. Their companions tell us what their characters are; if they associate with the vulgar, the licentious, and the profane, then their hearts are already stained with their guilt and shame, and they will themselves become alike vicious. Our moral and physical laws show how important it is to have proper associations of every kind, especially in youth. How dangerous it is to gaze on a picture or scene that pollutes the imagination or blunts the moral perceptions, or has a tendency to deaden a sense of our duty to God and man! (*Christian Treasury.*) **From the man that speaketh froward things.**—*Froward*.—This is a word which occurs more than once in these verses, and which occurs frequently throughout this book, and whereof I have not met with an exactly defined signification. Some understand by it peevishness or perverseness. Were I to consult its etymology I should rather conceive that it was "fromward"; and so, impetuous, headstrong, acting on the impulse of whatever feeling is uppermost in the mind, unrestrained by calculation or conscience, and the opposite, therefore, of discretion. In ver. 12 I should render the word by "unfaithful"; in ver. 14, by "perverse"; in chap. iii. 32, by "unlawful," or "transgressor of the law." But it is not easy to gather the precise meaning of the word "froward," as the original words for it are various. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*)

Vers. 13. To walk in the ways of darkness.—*Perils in the deep*:—Here an arm of the sea of life is spread out before us, and we are led to an eminence whence we may behold its raging. We must, one by one, go down into these great waters. We see many of our comrades sinking beneath the surge. It is good to count the number, and measure the height of these ranks of raging waves, that we may be induced to hold faster by the anchor of the soul, which is sure and steadfast. The dangers are delineated in exact order. I. "THE WAY OF EVIL." Whether they be persons or principles the word does not expressly say. The way of the evil is the way which Satan trod, and by which all his servants follow. II. "THE MAN THAT SEEKETH FROWARD THINGS." He is one of the foremost dangers to young men. In a workshop, or warehouse, or circle of private friendship, one with a foul tongue is a serious mischief-maker. It may be that the froward things are swearings; or impurities, or infidel insinuations; or mere silliness that fills with vanity, and tends to weaken the moral fibre. Even when a person does not sympathise with the evil, and imitate it, his conscience gets a wound. It is not good for us, in an experimental way, thus to know evil. III. "WHO LEAVE THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS." When the imagination is polluted, and the tongue let loose, the feet cannot keep on the path of righteousness. Thinking, and hearing, and speaking evil, will soon be followed by doing it. In all of us are the seeds of crime, and in many the seedlings are growing apace. He who would be kept from the path of the destroyer must crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts. In the matter of watching for one's soul the true wisdom is to take care of the beginnings. IV. "TO WALK IN THE WAYS OF DARKNESS." The doing of evil produces darkness, and darkness produces the evil-doing. Indulged lusts put out the eyesight of the conscience; and under the darkened conscience the lusts revel unchecked. V. "WHO REJOICE TO DO EVIL." A more advanced step in guilt. At first the backslider is ashamed of his fall. He palliates, alleges the strength of the temptation, and promises amendment. As the hardening progress goes on, he begins to feel more easy, and comes to rejoice in evil. VI. WHO "DELIGHT IN THE FROWARDNESS OF THE WICKED." These are more abandoned than the wicked themselves. To take pleasure in sin is a characteristic of fallen humanity; to delight in seeing others sinning is altogether devilish. To complete the picture of the dangers to which the young are exposed, one other peril of the world's deep is marked on the chart which is mercifully placed in the voyager's hands—it is "the strange woman." The deceiver is so-called. Marriage is honourable in all. Unlawful relations of the sexes mean wild, selfish passions, which will surely be followed by visible marks of God's vengeance. God's anger will track lust through all its secret doublings. He makes sin generate its own punishment. And the woe of a hardened sensualist is a "hell" indeed. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. To deliver thee from the strange woman.—*Sensual temptation*:—Gaze not on beauty too much, lest it blast thee; nor too long, lest it blind thee; nor too near lest it burn thee. If thou like it, it deceives thee; if thou love it, it disturbs thee; if thou hunt after it, it destroys thee. If virtue accompany it, it is the heart's paradise; if vice associate it, it is the fool's purgatory. It is the wise man's bon-fire, and the fool's furnace. (*Quarles.*) *The enticement of women*:—The deliverance from evil men was described before; now follows the deliverance from evil women, who are as dangerous to the young man, if not more, in regard to their crafty allurements. Men present as enticement unlawful gain; women offer unlawful pleasure. I. THERE IS A MEDICINE IN SCRIPTURE FOR EVERY DISEASE OF THE SOUL. Here an antidote against the poison of evil women. 1. There is a fence against several degrees of sin. Against evil thoughts; evil words, evil deeds. 2. There are many remedies for the same sin. Prohibitions, examples, judgments. II. THE DANGER FROM EVIL WOMEN IS GREAT. Illustrate Samson and Solomon. As good women are modest, so bad women are loud and bold. As good women are tenderly affected, so wicked ones are most cruel. Take heed of being overcome by smooth language. They will tell thee that they love none else, and will die for thee, but they love thy wealth and beauty, and will leave thee when these fail. (*Francis Taylor.*) *The strange woman*:—Surely one cannot declare the whole counsel of God and leave out a subject which is interwoven with almost every chapter in the Bible. I am entirely aware of the delicacy of introducing this subject into the pulpit. 1. One difficulty arises from the sensitiveness of unaffected purity. 2. Another difficulty springs from the nature of the English language, which has hardly been framed in a school where it may wind and fit itself to all

the phases of impurity. 3. Another difficulty lies in the confused echoes which vile men create in every community, when the pulpit disturbs them. 4. Another difficulty exists in the criminal fastidiousness of the community upon this subject. The proverbs of Solomon are designed to furnish us a series of maxims for every relation of life. There will naturally be the most said where there is the most needed. If the frequency of warning against any sin measures the liability of man to that sin, then none is worse than impurity. I. CAN LANGUAGE BE FOUND WHICH CAN DRAW A CORRUPT BEAUTY SO VIVIDLY AS THIS: "Which forsaketh the guide of her youth, and forgetteth the covenant of her God"? Look out upon that fallen creature whose gay sally through the street calls out the significant laugh of bad men, the pity of good men, and the horror of the pure! Was not her cradle as pure as ever a loved infant pressed? Love soothed its cries, sisters watched its peaceful sleep, and a mother pressed it fondly to her bosom! Had you afterwards, when spring-flowers covered the earth, and every gale was odour, and every sound was music, seen her, fairer than the lily or the violet, searching them, would you not have said, "Sooner shall the rose grow poisonous than she; both may wither, but neither corrupt"? And how often, at evening, did she clasp her tiny hands in prayer! Alas, she forsook the guide of her youth! Faint thoughts of evil, like a far-off cloud which the sunset gilds, came first; nor does the rosy sunset blush deeper along the heaven than her cheek at the first thought of evil. Now, O mother, and thou, guiding elder sister, could you have seen the lurking spirit embosomed in that cloud, a holy prayer might have broken the spell, a tear have washed its stain! Alas! they saw it not; she spoke it not; she was forsaking the guide of her youth. She thinketh no more of heaven. She breatheth no more prayers. Thou hast forsaken the covenant of thy God. Go down! fall never to rise! Hell opens to be thy home! II. THE NEXT INJUNCTION OF GOD TO THE YOUNG IS UPON THE ENSNARING DANGER OF BEAUTY. "Desire not her beauty in thy heart, neither let her take thee with her eyelids." God did not make so much of nature with exquisite beauty, or put within us a taste for it, without object. He meant that it should delight us. He made every flower to charm us. He never made a colour, nor graceful flying-bird, nor silvery insect, without meaning to please our taste. When He clothes a man or woman with beauty, He confers a favour, did we know how to receive it. Beauty, with amiable dispositions and ripe intelligence, is more to any woman than a queen's crown. As moths and tiny insects flutter around the bright blaze which was kindled for no harm, so the foolish young fall down burned and destroyed by the blaze of beauty. If God hath given thee beauty, tremble; for it is as gold in thy house: thieves and robbers will prow! around, and seek to possess it. If God hath put beauty before thine eyes, remember how many strong men have been cast down wounded by it. Art thou stronger than David? Let other men's destruction be thy wisdom; for it is hard to reap prudence upon the field of experience. III. In the minute description of this dangerous creature, mark next how SERIOUSLY WE ARE CAUTIONED OF HER WILES. 1. Her wiles of dress. Coverings of tapestry and the fine linen of Egypt are hers; the perfumes of myrrh, and aloes, and cinnamon. Silks and ribbons, lace and rings, gold and equipage; ah, how mean a price for damnation! The wretch who would be hung simply for the sake of riding to the gallows on a golden chariot, clothed in king's raiment, what a fool was he! 2. Her wiles of speech. Beasts may not speak; this honour is too high for them. To God's imaged son this prerogative belongs, to utter thought and feeling in articulate sounds. We may breathe our thoughts to a thousand ears, and infect a multitude with the worst portions of our soul. How, then, has this soul's breath, this echo of our thoughts, this only image of our feelings, been perverted, that from the lips of sin it hath more persuasion than from the lips of wisdom? Purity sounds morose and cross; but from the lips of the harlot words drop as honey, and flow smoother than oil: her speech is fair, her laugh is merry as music. The eternal glory of purity has no lustre; but the deep damnation of lust is made as bright as the gate of heaven! 3. Her wiles of love. Love is the mind's light and heat; it is that tenuous air in which all other faculties exist as we exist in the atmosphere. A mind of the greatest stature without love is like the huge pyramid of Egypt—chill and cheerless in all its dark halls and passages. A mind with love is as a king's palace lighted for a royal festival. Shame that the sweetest of all the mind's attributes should be suborned to sin! Devil-tempter! will thy poison never cease? Shall beauty be poisoned? shall language be charmed? shall love be made to defile like pitch, and burn as the living coals? Trust the sea with thy tiny boat, trust the fickle wind, trust the changing skies of

April, trust the miser's generosity, the tyrant's mercy; but, ah! simple man, trust not thyself near the artful woman, armed in her beauty, her cunning raiment, her dimpled smiles. 4. Next beware the wile of her reasonings. "To him that wanteth understanding, she saith, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. I came forth to meet thee, and I have found thee." What says she in the credulous ear of inexperience? Why, she tells him that sin is safe; she swears to him that sin is pure. Out of history she will entice him, and say, "Who hath ever refused my meat-offerings and drink-offerings? What king have I not sought? What conqueror have I not conquered? Philosophers have not, in all their wisdom, learned to hate me. I have been the guests of the world's greatest men. Art thou afraid to tread where Plato trod, and the pious Socrates? Art thou wiser than all that ever lived?" Nay, she readeth the Bible to him; she goeth back along the line of history, and readeth of Abraham, and of his glorious compeers; she skippeth past Joseph with averted looks, and readeth of David and of Solomon. Or, if the Bible will not cheat thee, how will she plead thine own nature; how will she whisper, "God hath made thee so." How, like her father, will she lure to pluck the apple, saying, "Thou shalt not surely die." I will point only to another wile. When inexperience has been beguiled by her infernal machinations, how, like a flock of startled birds, will spring up late regrets, and shame, and fear; and, worst of all, how will conscience ply her scorpion-whip and lash thee, uttering with stern visage, "Thou art dishonoured, thou art a wretch, thou art lost!" So, God saith, the strange woman shall secure her ensnared victims if they struggle. "Lest thou shouldst ponder the path of life, her ways are moveable that thou canst not know them." She is afraid to see thee soberly thinking of leaving her, and entering the path of life; therefore her ways are moveable. She multiplies devices, she studies a thousand new wiles, she has some sweet word for every sense—obsequence for thy pride, praise for thy vanity, generosity for thy selfishness, religion for thy conscience. IV. Having disclosed her wiles, let me show you what God says OF THE CHANCES OF ESCAPE TO THOSE WHO ONCE FOLLOW HER. "None that go unto her return again, neither take they hold of the paths of life." The strength of this language was not meant absolutely to exclude hope. Some may escape—as here and "here a mangled sailor crawls out of the water upon the beach—the only one or two of the whole crew. There are many evils which hold their victims by the force of habit; there are others which fasten them by breaking their return to society. Many a person never reforms, because reform would bring no relief. There are other evils which hold men to them, because they are like the beginning of a fire; they tend to burn with fiercer and wider flames, until all fuel is consumed, and go out only when there is nothing to burn. Of this last kind is the sin of licentiousness; and when the conflagration once breaks out, experience has shown what the Bible long ago declared, that the chances of reformation are few indeed. V. We are repeatedly warned against the strange woman's house. Her house has been cunningly planned by an evil architect to attract and please the attention. It stands in a vast garden full of enchanting objects; it shines in glowing colours, and seems full of peace and full of pleasure. All the signs are of unbounded enjoyment—safe, if not innocent. Though every beam is rotten, and the house is the house of death, and in it are all the vicissitudes of infernal misery, yet to the young it appears a palace of delight. They will not believe that death can lurk behind so brilliant a fabric. That part of the garden which borders on the highway of innocence is carefully planted. There is not a poison-weed, nor thorn, nor thistle there. Ten thousand flowers bloom, and waft a thousand odours. A victim cautiously inspects it; but it has been too carefully patterned upon innocence to be easily detected. "Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither." Will the youth enter? Will he seek her house? To himself he says, "I will enter only to see the garden—its fruits, its flowers, its birds, its arbours, its warbling fountains!" He is resolved in virtue. He seeks wisdom, not pleasure! Dupe! you are deceived already; and this is your first lesson of wisdom. He passes, and the porter leers behind him! He is within an enchanter's garden! He ranges the outer garden near to the highway, thinking as he walks, "How foolishly have I been alarmed at pious lies about this beautiful place! I heard it was hell: I find it is paradise!" Emboldened by the innocence of his first steps, he explores the garden further from the road. The flowers grow richer; their odours exhilarate. Ridiculous priest, to tell me that death was here, where all is beauty, fragrance, and melody! Surely, death never lurked in so gorgeous apparel as this! When our passions enchant us, how beautiful is the way to death! Where are his resolutions now? This is the

virtuous youth who came to observe ! He has already seen too much ! but he will see more ; he will taste, feel, regret, weep, wail, die ! It is too late ! He has gone in—who shall never return. “ He goeth after her straightway as an ox goeth to the slaughter ; or as a fool to the correction of the stocks . . . and knoweth not that it is for his life.” Enter with me, in imagination, the strange woman’s house, where, God grant, you may never enter in any other way. There are five wards—Pleasure, Satiety, Discovery, Disease, Death. 1. Ward of Pleasure. The eye is dazzled with the magnificence of its apparel—elastic velvet, glossy silks, burnished satin, crimson drapery, plushy carpets. Exquisite pictures glow upon the wall ; carved marble adorns every niche. 2. Ward of Satiety. Overflushed with dance, sated with wine and fruit, a fitful drowsiness vexes them. They wake, to crave ; they taste, to loathe ; they sleep, to dream ; they wake again from unquiet visions. They long for the sharp taste of pleasure, so grateful yesterday. The glowing garden and the banquet now seem all stripped and gloomy. 3. The Ward of Discovery. In the third ward no deception remains. The floors are bare ; the naked walls drip filth ; the air is poisonous with sickly fumes, and echoes with mirth, concealing hideous misery. None supposes that he has been happy. The past seems like the dream of the miser who gathers gold spilt like rain upon the road, and wakes, clutching his bed, and crying, “ Where is it ?” 4. Ward of Disease. 5. Ward of Death. No longer does the incarnate wretch pretend to conceal her cruelty. She thrusts, aye, as if they were dirt—she shovels out the wretches. Some fall headlong through the rotten floor—a long fall to a fiery bottom. The floor trembles to deep thunders which roll below. Here and there jets of flame sprout up, and give a lurid light to the murky hall. Oh, that the young might see the end of vice before they see the beginning ! 1. I solemnly warn you against indulging a morbid imagination. In that busy and mischievous faculty begins the evil. 2. Next to evil imaginations, I warn the young of evil companions. Decaying fruit corrupts the neighbouring fruit. 3. But I warn you, with yet more solemn emphasis, against evil books and evil pictures. 4. Once more, let me persuade you that no examples in high places can justify imitation in low places. 5. Let me beseech you, lastly, to guard your heart-purity. Never lose it. If it be gone, you have lost from the casket the most precious gift of God. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 17. Which forsaketh the guide of her youth.—*The peril of taking life into our own control.*—We all shrink with horror from that lowest depth of human depravity here described ; but we may not therefore lose the lessons of this solemn and masterly description. Forsaking and forgetting God is the one danger of life ; forsaking that guidance which is from Him and leads to Him, and forgetting that covenant which binds us unto Him. The course of degradation and mischief of the unhappy person here portrayed is derived from the two facts of the text. Who remembers not, who regrets not, the fresh and balmy morning of youth ? Then we were guided in the ways of righteousness. There is a season when youth becomes independent and intolerant, and chafes under the most gentle guidance. These are the days of second thoughts, days when the sweetness of forbidden waters is tasted, when the border of the debatable land is crossed. These are critical days in every man’s life. Some have slipped and recovered the steps which had almost gone. With some the reason of self-guidance and independence has never passed away. They have forsaken the guide of their youth. The reason of this woful departure and falling away is thus given. “ She forgetteth the covenant of her God.” And are not our young people bound in covenant ? Baptism and confirmation are its seals. Alas ! that so many tokens of the forgetfulness of the covenant of our God are evident on the very surface of society to-day, and met with in common associations. (*Dean Alford.*)

Ver. 20. Walk in the way of good men.—*The true way of walking.*—Here is the general application of the counsels of the chapter for the good that will come to those that avoid the society of evil men and women. I. MEN CANNOT WALK IN GOOD WAYS UNLESS THEY LEAVE THE BAD ONES. Because good and evil being contraries, the one will keep out the other : as cold keeps out heat, and heat cold. Evil thoughts keep out all thoughts of good. II. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO AVOID EVIL, WE MUST ACTUALLY DO GOOD. Because forsaking evil is but a foundation for a greater building, and no man can dwell on a foundation. III. ONE CHIEF AND PRINCIPAL END OF WISDOM IS WELL-DOING. No blessing attends on mere knowing. A curse follows upon knowledge without practice. IV. IT IS SAFER TO IMITATE GOOD MEN THAN BAD.

Because the way of good men is better, and their end is better. V. **GOOD EXAMPLE SOMETIMES PREVAILS TO DRAW OTHERS TO PIETY.** Because shame is taken away by good examples going before. And fear also is taken away. We should follow the choicest examples of goodness. Why shouldst thou not rather follow the example of Abraham, Job, Joseph, David, than of Ishmael, Esau, and other profane persons? Sheep will not follow wolves, but they will follow one another. So do thou follow good men to heaven, rather than bad men to hell. (*Francis Taylor.*)

Ver. 22. **Transgressors shall be rooted out of it.**—*The present punishments of evil men.*—The metaphor “rooted out” is taken from a tree. If a wild tree and offensive grow in a garden, and the gardener cut off the top of it, if it send forth new sprouts, as bad as the former, he digs up the root itself. So doth God deal with wicked men. He takes them away, and if their posterity follow their courses, He proceeds to root out the whole name and family. I. **GOD WILL SOMETIMES IN THIS WORLD PUT A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GOOD MEN AND BAD.** That men may see who God is, and learn what He is. II. **WICKED MEN ARE RESTLESS IN EVIL.** Because they have a body of sin in them, and abundance of opportunities around them; and are left by God to run on to perdition. So they are never weary of sinning. III. **WICKED MEN’S LIVES ARE OFTEN CUT SHORT BY THEIR WICKED COURSES.** Drunkenness breeds drowsies; gluttony breeds fevers; wantonness breeds foul diseases. Trouble of conscience sometimes makes men end their days. God’s just judgments fall on them. IV. **TRANSGRESSORS DEAL TREACHEROUSLY WITH GOD.** Because they fail in the trust committed to them; act against their trust; betray God’s honour; and labour to undo God’s Church. V. **SIN ROOTS OUT THE POSTERITY OF WICKED MEN.** Because sin goes by propagation, and also by imitation. VI. **IF MEN WILL NOT FOR THEIR OWN SAKES FORSAKE SIN, THEY SHOULD DO IT FOR THEIR CHILDREN’S SAKES.** Much evil may come on our posterity from our sins: as hereditary diseases, poverty, losses, crosses. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER III.

VERS. 1-35. My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments.—*Useful precepts and inspiring motives.*—I. **TO REMEMBER AND KEEP IN OUR HEARTS THE THINGS WRITTEN IN THIS BOOK (vers. 1, 2).** Interest dictates to us the propriety of keeping God’s commandments. II. **TO LIVE IN THE EXERCISE OF MERCY AND TRUTH (ver. 3),** in every part of our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, however defective they may be in the practice of these virtues to us. As workers under the Spirit we are required to write the law of kindness and of truth upon the tables of our heart, by maintaining deep impressions of it, by meditating upon the peaceful motives that should excite us to that virtue, and by endeavouring, through the grace of Christ, to have our hearts habitually disposed to all those duties which are the natural fruits of love and integrity. God is well pleased, not only with the reverence and love which His people show to Himself, but with that generosity and mercy, that sincerity and faithfulness, which they evince to their fellow-men. To find in His children His true though imperfect image greatly delights the Deity. That understanding which is good in the sight of God and man is another fruit of the constant practice of mercy and truth. III. **TO DEPEND ON GOD, AND NOT ON OUR OWN UNDERSTANDING (ver. 5).** To trust in God is to depend on Him for bestowing on us every needful blessing, and preserving us from all evil. This dependence on God is to be exercised with all our hearts, our judgments being persuaded that God is the only and the all-sufficient object of confidence, and our souls resting with full satisfaction in His power and faithfulness. We must renounce every sublunary dependence; we must not make our own understanding a staff to our hearts. IV. **TO BE LIBERAL IN THE SERVICE OF GOD (vers. 9, 10).** Earthly substance is necessary for the use of our bodies, but we are called to make a nobler use of it than in the mere service of the outward man. We are to honour the Lord with it, making no use of any part of our increase till we have set apart a reasonable proportion of it for the service of God. V. **TO BEHAVE ARIGHT UNDER AFFLICTIVE PROVIDENCES (ver. 11).** We are warned against despising Divine rebukes, or fainting under them. The rebukes of

providence are despised when persons regard not the supreme hand which afflicts, when they consider not the design of God in afflicting, or when, through stupidity of mind or hardness of heart, they neglect to comply with it. Afflictions may be despised when men do not value them as necessary and useful. Weariness under the Divine correction is another common fault, which we must avoid with care. Our hearts must not fret against the Lord, nor suffer reflecting thoughts to spring up, for God never exceeds the due measure in distressing us. No ingredient is poured into the cup of affliction, but by infinite wisdom and grace. Ever keep in mind who it is that afflicts us. Let all flesh keep silent before Him. He is a Father, and chastens us in love. VI. To ESTEEM WISDOM, AND EARNESTLY PURSUE IT (vers. 13-26). All the treasures of wisdom are hid in Christ, and He communicates the precious gift by His Word and Spirit. The excellency of wisdom appears in the gifts she bestows. She is a munificent princess, holding in both hands the richest presents, to be given to her servants. A happy life extended to old age is given to the lovers of wisdom, and riches and honour are given in the same sense as length of days. And religion is not less conducive to pleasure than it is to honour and wealth. It will readily be admitted that some of wisdom's ways are pleasant; but are they all so? There is peace and pleasure in repentance, which is sweetened by the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ. There is pleasure in self-denial, for he that practises it knows that he is the true self-seeker. There is pleasure and peace in tribulations, because when they abound, consolations abound much more by Christ. There is peace in fighting the Lord's battles. All the exercises, all the privileges, all the hopes of religion, are full of pleasure. Add the glory which belongs to wisdom, as it appears in creation and providence (vers. 19, 20). No wisdom is sound but that which is taught by the Word of God, and approved by Him who is the author of wisdom. This sound wisdom makes us discreet and prudent, and guards us against that selfish cunning which has so often assumed its name. Safety is another of the great advantages which always attend wisdom. Walking in the ways of the Lord, we may banish those fears that would distress the soul. The Lord is a sure ground of confidence in the worst of times. Our proper exercise in such seasons is to trust in the Lord, and to pour out our hearts before Him, knowing that He will be a refuge for us. (*G. Lawson.*) *Religious impressions to be retained*:—Travellers tell us that the constant rubbing of the sand on Egyptian hieroglyphs removes every trace of colour, and even effaces the deep-cut characters from basalt rocks. So the unceasing action of multitudinous trifles will take all the bloom off your religion, and cause the name of the King cut on the tablets of your heart to be forgotten if you do not counteract them by constant, earnest effort. *Godliness*:—I. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH REGARD FOR LAW (ver. 1). 1. Appropriation. "My law." Before we commend the Word of God to others we must receive it ourselves. 2. Instruction. "Forget not." This implies that something has been taught. 3. Exhortation. "Forget not." There are few things men so soon forget as Divine commands. The godly man is one who respects righteous law. He delights in the law of the Lord (Psa. i. 2; Rom. vii. 22). The moral law is eternal, and must be regarded by all true followers of Christ. Obedience to it is not the ground of justification, but this is attained in the work of sanctification. II. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH PRESENT ADVANTAGES (ver. 2). 1. Intensity of life. "Length of days." In the long run the longest day is the day that has the longest record of service for God. 2. Length of life. "Long life." "A blessing," say some, "of the Jewish dispensation." A blessing, rather let us say, of all dispensations. "Righteousness tendeth to life" as much now as ever, and, other things being equal, he will live the longest who lives the best. 3. Serenity of life. "Peace." Tranquillity continuing through all the years. The peace of the man who hearkens to God is like a river (Isa. xlvi. 18), getting broader and deeper as it gets nearer to the sea. III. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH REGARD FOR THE WELL-BEING OF MEN. "Mercy" (R.V. margin, "kindness") "and truth" (ver. 3). See here the bearing of a godly life upon the good of men. The mind of God is one of "good-will toward men" (Luke ii. 14), and those who would be God-like must be of the same mind (Matt. v. 45). IV. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH FAITH IN GOD (ver. 5). Trust in the Lord is the secret of safety (chap. xxix. 25), of happiness (chap. xvi. 20), and of spiritual prosperity (chap. xxviii. 25). V. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD (ver. 6). This acknowledgment of God is to be—1. Personal. "Thy ways." 2. "In all thy ways." Man's ways are many. Some walk in high places, some in lowly valleys. The way of some is

in the sea, of others in the office, of others in the academy, of others in the senate. Some men walk in many ways. Abraham Lincoln was a rail-splitter, a store-keeper, a bargeman, a lawyer, a member of a State legislature, a Congressman, and President of the United States, but in all positions he acknowledged God. At the threshold of life "he had," says one of his biographers, "a profound trust in Providence"; and when he left Springfield for Washington to take his place as President he said to his friends, "Pray that I may receive that Divine assistance without which I cannot proceed." 3. In our own sphere. We need not go out of our way. The ordinary path of life will "furnish all we ought to ask." The promise in the sixth verse suggests that we may acknowledge God by looking to Him for guidance, and it gives the assurance of Divine direction. VI. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH HUMILITY (ver. 7). "Be not wise in thine own eyes." "Many," says Seneca, "might have attained wisdom had they not thought they had attained it." The way to godliness is in the footsteps of Christ, and to follow in that path we must be meek and lowly in heart. VII. GODLINESS IS ASSOCIATED WITH PRACTICAL HOLINESS (vers. 7-9). 1. The godly man will shun evil. "Depart from evil." To "depart" may be rendered to "turn aside." As men sometimes "cut" those they do not wish to see, so is evil to be "cut." To go into the way of evil is to run a risk of falling into it. 2. Cultivate benevolence (ver. 9). Christian benevolence is substantial ("substance," not merely good wishes); generous ("first-fruits"); God-honouring ("honour the Lord"). Those who with a right motive give of what God has given them acknowledge their indebtedness to Him and His ownership in what they possess. VIII. GODLINESS IS GAIN (ver. 10). Gain is not always godliness, but godliness is always gain in the highest sense. The giving of the first-fruits fills the barns. (*H. Thorne.*) *The earthly rewards of wisdom*:—We are taught to look for the fruit of righteousness in long life and prosperity, for the penalty of sin in premature destruction. We are accustomed to dwell on the promised joys of the future world as if godliness had no promise of the life which now is, and in so doing we take all life and colour from those expected blessings. The true view seems to be, the way of wisdom, the path of the upright, is so full of joy, so crowned with peace; the life of the children of the kingdom is so wisely and bountifully provided for; the inevitable pains and troubles which fall to their share are so transformed, that from this present good we can infer a future better, gathering hints and promises of what we shall be from the realised felicity of what we are. What are the immediate and apprehensible benefits of the life which is lived according to the dictates of heavenly wisdom? I. THE RIGHT LIFE IS A WHOLESOME LIFE, PHYSICALLY HEALTHY. The body is a sacred trust, a temple of the Holy Ghost; to use it ill is to violate the trust and to defile the temple. The temperance of habit and orderliness of life which Wisdom requires of her children are the first conditions of vitality. Peace of mind, cheerfulness of temper, the transfer of all anxiety from the human spirit to the strong Spirit of God, are very favourable to longevity. Let no one think of measuring life only by days and years. Each day should be a full, rich day, unmarred by recollections, unshadowed by apprehensions. Each day is distinctly worth living. The life in God is undoubtedly a healthy life, nor is it the less healthy because the outward man has to decay, and mortality has to be swallowed up of life. II. THE RIGHT LIFE REQUIRES FAIR DEALING BETWEEN MAN AND MAN. The main economic principle of wisdom is this, that all legitimate trade is the mutual advantage of buyer and seller. III. WISDOM COMMANDS NOT ONLY JUSTICE, BUT GENEROSITY. She requires her children to yield the first-fruits of all their possessions to the Lord, and to look tenderly upon His poor. And the teaching of experience is that those who act upon this precept purchase to themselves a good possession. IV. LOOK AT THE DEEPER, MORE SPIRITUAL RESULTS OF RIGHT LIVING. God is so much to men, that clear vision and strong action are utterly impossible apart from a humble dependence upon Him. The beginning of all wisdom is in the recognition of God, in personal submission to Him, in diligent obedience to all His directions. We do not at first see what is meant by trusting in the Lord with all our heart; we confuse it with that tepid, conventional relation to God which too frequently passes current for faith. They who do entirely renounce their own judgment, who, with their whole heart trusting Him, acknowledge Him in all their ways, find their lives running over with blessing, and become the means of incalculable good to the world and to themselves. It would not be easy to make plain or even credible to those who have never trusted in God how this guidance and direction are given. When a few years have been passed in humble depen-

dence on God, it is then possible to look back and see with astonishing clearness how real and decisive the leadings of the Spirit have been. Our life, we find, is all a plan of God, and He conceals it from us, as if on purpose to evoke our trust, and to secure that close and personal communion which the uncertainty renders necessary. Some are suspicious of the "Inward Light," as it is called. That may be because they do not trust the Lord "with the whole heart." Wisdom calls for a certain absoluteness in all our relations to God, a fearless, unreserved, and constantly renewed submission of heart to Him. And while the external results of wisdom are great and marked, this inward result, which is the spring of them all, is more blessed than any. The supreme bliss of the heavenly wisdom is that it leads us into a detailed obedience to the law which is our life; it sets us under the immediate and unbroken control of God. To know the secret of the Lord, to walk in this world not guideless, but led by the Lord of life, to approach death itself not fearful, but in the hands of that Infinite Love for whom death does not exist, surely this is worth more than the gold and precious stones which belong only to the earth and are earthy. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. Long life and peace shall they add to thee.—*The philosophy of health and peace*:—I. OBEDIENCE TO MORAL LAW IS A CONDITION OF PHYSICAL HEALTH. Heart-obedience is required. The connection is clear from three facts. 1. That physical health requires obedience to the Divine laws of our being. 2. That obedience to the Divine laws of our being involves the study of them. 3. That a hearty agreement with the Divine will is essential to secure the study of His laws. II. OBEDIENCE TO MORAL LAW IS A CONDITION OF SPIRITUAL PEACE. Peace of soul requires two things. 1. The inward harmony of its powers. 2. The sense of the Divine favour. The feeling, or even the fear, that the Lord is against it, gives it the throb of perpetual restlessness or torture. Obedience to moral law secures the two conditions of this peace. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee.—*Mercy and truth*:—As the wings of the cherubim touched one another in the midst of the house, so Mercy and Truth are such a pair as will either lodge together or leave together. There was such a similitude of nature between the Twins of Love, eros and anteros, that at once they wept, and at once they smiled, they fell sick together, and they recovered jointly. Such are the Twins of Grace, Truth, and Mercy; she that would have them cut in twain and parted is an harlot, she that cries spare and preserve them whole, she is the mother and must enjoy them. Look upon them in a state of policy; mercy without truth is a sweet shower dropping on the barren sands, quite spilt, and no blessing follows it. Truth without mercy is extreme right and extreme injury. Mercy without truth is a dangerous pity. Truth without mercy is not verity but severity. Consider them towards God and heaven, and then most unfit it is that either should be alone. A faith of mere protestation without good works, such is truth without mercy; it might have been in the Gergesene swine, for such a faith is in the devil, says St. James. All the integrity of the heathen, all the goodness that Socrates could teach, because it is not in Christ, such is mercy without truth. St. Austin compares them thus: "A pagan living without blame before man is a man with his eyes open in the dark midnight, and he that professeth Christ and not mercy, but is sold to commit iniquity, is one with his eyes shut in a clear day, and he sees as little." (*Bp. Hacket.*) **Bind them about thy neck.**—*True phylacteries* (see Deut. vi. 8):—I. THE SUBSTANCE OF A TRUE PHYLACTERY: "Mercy and truth." These are the two grand elements of revelation. They meet man's nature as a being possessing intellect and heart, each of which has its respective cravings and claims. II. THE USES OF A TRUE PHYLACTERY. The old phylacteries seem to be used—1. As mementoes. They were to remind the wearer of the law. 2. As safeguards. This was, indeed, a later and superstitious use. Still "mercy and truth" rightly worn are safeguards. They protect us from what is wrong and ruinous. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The combination of mercy and truth in a good life*:—A double metaphor, wherein keeping mercy and truth, or exercising them outwardly, is compared to tying a gold chain about the neck for ornament; and retaining them in the heart is compared to things written in a table-book, that they may not be forgotten. 1. Duties to men are to be made conscience of, as well as duties to God. 2. Mercy and truth should always go together; because both are ornaments to us. Men wear lace on good clothes, so doth mercy adorn truth. Both are profitable unto others. 3. The want of one buries the commendation of the other. 4. Both

are together in God, else could we look for no favour from Him. Truth is required in all our dealings with men; but truth must always be tempered and toned with mercy. (*Francis Taylor.*) **Write them upon the table of thine heart.**—*Soul literature*:—Writing is a very ancient art. Moses knew it. There is a yet older writing, the penmanship of the soul. In this art every man is a busy writer. The soul registers every impression made on it. In comparing soul-writing with that of the pen, two things are observable—correspondence and dissimilarity. I. CORRESPONDENCE. Both imply readers. Accuracy in both requires training. Both are either useful or injurious. II. DISSIMILARITY. Soul-writing is more universal; more voluminous; more permanent; more useful to Christianity. Truth written by the soul in the life is more legible than truth written by the pen. It is more convincing; and it is more persuasive. Conclusion: 1. Life is a book which we are writing day by day. 2. The book of life should be a Christian book. 3. This book of life will have to be examined. (*Homilist.*) **Sacred inscriptions on the heart**:—At places of public resort, such as the summit of a lofty mountain or the site of a famous monument, you may see tables of wood or stone or level turf. All over them inscriptions have been chiselled so thickly that you could not now find an unoccupied spot to plant a letter on. The characters are various—some old, some new, some well-formed, some irregular scrawls, some mere scratches on the surface which a winter's storms will wash out, some so deep that they will be legible for ages. The table lies there, the helpless recipient of ideas, good or bad, that stray comers may impress upon it. The heart of man is like one of these common public receptacles. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) **Receptive tablets**:—1. The duty of parents is clear, and their encouragements are great. Watch the young. Stand beside that soft, receptive tablet. Keep trespassers away. Insert many truths. Busily fill the space with good, and that too in attractive forms. This is the work laid to your hand. 2. Afflictive providences generally have a bearing on this printing process. God sends what will break the heart or melt it. The heart, in contact with a busy world, was rubbed smooth and slippery. The type, when it touched, glided off the surface, and left no mark behind. This bruising and breaking opened the crust, and let the lesson in. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 4. So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.—*The commencement of the religious life*:—There was a moment in our existence when we committed our first sin; and there was a moment when we first lifted up our hearts in prayer and thanksgiving to our Father in heaven. None of us probably recollect either of these moments. I. **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A RELIGIOUS LIFE?** How are we to live to maintain our own self-respect, to be morally pure, to be acceptable to God, to love Him and serve Him, and do good to and love our neighbour? The ceremonial of religion in itself is not religion; it is too often put in the place of real goodness and piety. The belief of any or of every creed is not religion. Intellectual states and ecclesiastical connections are not religion. Gloom, sadness, melancholy, superstition, fanaticism, are not religion. Before we can become truly religious we must have correct views of God, of ourselves, of our relationship to God, of sin, and of hating and forsaking it. Reverence for, and the sincere love of, God is one mark of a religious life. Self-control upon religious principles is another and distinctive mark of the religious life. Our reverence and love of God are practically embodied and developed in our self-government. As Christians, we should lead a life in harmony with the Divine example which Jesus has placed before us. He has in His life and ministry revealed to us the character of the Father, and the religious life that we should lead as His followers. We receive Christ to be our Teacher, Guide, Friend, Counsellor, Example, and Redeemer. II. **THE COMMENCEMENT OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE.** This is a matter of deep interest to us all. Some have no recollection of any other state than that in which they are now living; others have a broad line which marks the past and the present. Matthew, Zacchæus, Nicodemus, Paul, and others, were familiar with, and could narrate all the circumstances of their religious history. The means and agencies of the change from darkness to light, from error to truth, from wickedness to righteousness, from vice to virtue, from irreligion to an enlightened humble piety, are very varied. It is not the usual order of things that aged persons become religious, and as for death-bed conversions, we have as little faith in them as in death-bed incantations, extreme unction, and priestly absolutions. It is the life of a man that proclaims who he is and what he is. Christianity is for life. The life of a sincere Christian always fits for death. To be leading and enjoying such a life

in youth is one of God's greatest blessings. If you covet goodness of heart and purity of mind, lead a Christian life. If you desire true greatness, manliness, and honour, lead a Christian life. If you seek for a good hope of immortality, lead a Christian life. (*R. Ainslie.*) *The secret of success*:—The poet here gives us not only melodious measures, but valuable truths, even the secret of life which has often eluded the search of moralists and speculative philosophers. He unfolds that which to us is of vital moment—the secret of success. We all desire prosperity. One avenue to success is making money; another is culture; another is self-indulgence. The text says happiness is not intellectual but a moral quality. True wisdom is the reverence and love of God. We are set in right relations with God; and this is a source of peace. Religion is not a disagreeable condition on which a blessing rests, a dark tunnel through which we reach a shining land beyond. It is a gift of God, radiant and happy, an appeal not to our lower tastes, but to all that is exalted within us. In the way of religion we learn the true secret of success. (*R. S. Storrs, D.D.*) *The way to favour*:—The men of the world may hate the principles of the man of God, but the latter will have a testimony in his conscience, and if he maintains a steadfast consistency, will command respect and good-will. This is the only legitimate way of finding favour with men. Their favour must be foregone if it cannot be gotten but by conduct inconsistent with right principle. It is but a false and selfish and temporary favour at the best that can thus be obtained; and it is obtained at the expense of what is infinitely more precious, the favour of God. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. Trust in the Lord . . . lean not to thine own understanding.—*Reason and faith*:—The question is, not whether we shall use reason, but what are its limits? Shall we accept only what we can understand and explain, and refuse all which does not quadrate with our reason? Is Faith, with her delicate ear, her quick sensibility, and wondrous prescience, to have no place? In the power of modern reason can we know every inch of our way? 1. How is it in the business world? The activities of men are put forth in faith and trust. Commerce would fold her wings but for this principle of faith. 2. How is it in still more practical life? 3. History and mental science teach us the folly of leaning to our own understanding. 4. In Biblical and scientific theology may be found further illustration of the text. When the believer is in Christ, faith points the way to higher circles of truth. Much that is beyond reason does not contradict reason. (*Stephen R. Dennen, D.D.*) *The supreme wisdom of perfect trust in God*:—I. THE INSUFFICIENCY OF THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING. 1. Its inherent weakness. 2. The brevity of its experience, making it impossible to form right conclusions upon those concerns which extend into eternity backward and forward. 3. Its limit in space. The universe extends beyond reach of finite imagination. 4. It has no certain communion with the spirit world; hence eternal things are not to be trusted to our understanding. II. THE SUFFICIENCY OF GOD. 1. He knows all things thoroughly as Creator and Preserver. 2. He has power over all things. 3. His love for us is unlimited. Conclusion: 1. Oppose scepticism as one of the follies of a weak understanding. 2. Surrender wholly to God's guidance. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Trust in God*: I. WHAT IS IT TO TRUST IN THE LORD? 1. To be persuaded that He is able to counsel thee what to do. 2. That He is willing and able to give wholesome advice to those who need it. 3. To look unto God for counsel. 4. Confidently to expect seasonable directions from Him. II. WHY IS IT A DUTY TO TRUST IN THE LORD? 1. Every one is bound to order his affairs the best he can. 2. It is a right acknowledgment of God. 3. It is following the inclination of a generous heart. Lessons: 1. They act sinfully and foolishly who do not wholly trust in the Lord for direction in their affairs. 2. Do what God's holy ones of old used to do—make Him thy oracle, counsel, guide. (*George Barker.*) *Trusting in God with all the heart*:—God in everything requires the heart, the undivided heart. In the text is one great secret of the Divine life, the principle on which it rests, the food by which it is fed. It is to be taken from all worldly dependencies and securities, and resting in the consciousness of being one with God, in holy fellowship, in perpetual nourishment and support. Men commonly fail in the practical outworking of their trust, in their daily employment, and experience and walk. Earthly instruments are too much sought and relied upon independently of God. I. THE AFFECTIONS MAY BE, AND OFTEN ARE, VIOLENTLY EXCITED AND WORKED UPON, AND YET NOT BROUGHT TO A HOLY SUBJECTION UNTO GOD. There may be, with much religious warmth and sentiment, no small remnant of the evil temper and ungoverned will; even in humility itself

an arrogant and self-righteous display, as if the sinner were more humble than his neighbour, as if he had a merit in God's sight on account of his numerous and extravagant lamentations. Great numbers are held in a chain of error under the notion of a spiritual superiority; they are really full of a miserable conceit.

II. MANY BELIEVE ALL THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE, AND CLAIM FOR THEMSELVES A PECULIAR SOUNDNESS AND PURITY OF FAITH, IN WHOM THAT FAITH IS BUT A SPECULATIVE MATTER, AND NOT AN OPERATIVE PRINCIPLE. Men deceive themselves with notions of faith, and take up with that which is not real, which has no life in it. That which is trusted to as principle is so received as to be no principle at all; is a mere assent of the understanding, and not a conviction working in the heart. Nothing can be right and true, no tenet, no belief, which does not incorporate us with God, and bring us into subjection to Him.

III. THE ORDINANCES AND MEANS OF GRACE MAY BE UTTERLY INEFFECTUAL. Prayer is unavailing if unaccompanied with any trust, any abiding trust, in God. All our means and talents are given for active, diligent employment. Faith is to be continually remaining as a vital energy in the breast, as the monitor and guide, as the comfort and support, of all true believers, whatever they do, wherever they go. It produces not only a leaning upon Divine grace on particular occasions of meditation or devotion, but an unfailing regard to God's providential wisdom and goodness and government in daily life. God is in everything, above all, through all, in all. To those who wholly trust in God, not leaning to their own understanding, but ready in all things to obey His will and Word, the Lord will be a perpetual guide. There is a mystic intercourse, an invisible superintendence, a secret agency, a leading hand, always near and always employed for the safety and well-being of those who commit themselves implicitly and faithfully to the Lord's holy keeping. (*J. Slade, M.A.*)

Reliance upon God:— Hope is ever accompanied with trust, reliance, and confidence on something, and it is either well or ill grounded. What is there besides God on which we are apt to repose our trust? Fortune or chance; the favour of the world; friends; riches and power; men's own abilities, caution, forecast, prudence, and diligence. There is nothing in which we can reasonably trust, except the Divine Providence.

1. That our reliance may be rational, we should know what it is that God hath promised, and what we may expect from Him. No absolute and unconditioned promises of material blessings are made to us. We are promised contentment and peace of mind. He who is contented cannot be unhappy.
2. Reliance must be accompanied with obedience, with a serious and settled purpose, and with honest endeavours to do the things which are pleasing to God.
3. Reliance on God is founded on—(1) His goodness; (2) the relation between Him and us; (3) His promises.
4. Reliance is a duty which is not to be exercised, and cannot be exercised, by the wicked. They who will not serve God commonly put no confidence in Him. They fear Him perhaps, but they love Him not. Obedience to God is naturally accompanied with reliance on God.
5. Reliance on God should be accompanied with supplications to Him to bless us.
6. Reliance should be united with diligence and prudence in our worldly affairs.
7. Reliance excludes immoderate cares, and vain desires, and fretful discontent, and dissatisfaction; for he who firmly believes that all is ordered for the best, and shall conduce to his happiness, cannot live in slavish subjection to these turbulent passions. Reliance will not make a man insensible to trouble, but it will have a considerable effect towards regulating his affections and composing his heart, and producing an acquiescence to the will of God.
8. Reliance is a noble virtue, and a disposition of mind most agreeable to God. God hath made singular promises in favour of it. Reliance is thus acceptable because it implies love for God, and desire to please Him; and because it is the greatest honour we can pay to Him. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*)

*Good and evil:—*I. THE GOOD TO BE SECURED.

 1. Supreme trust. This means, undoubtedly; undividedly; lovingly.
 2. Supreme trust in the supremely good. "In the Lord." The All-wise; the All-loving; the All-holy; the All-mighty.

II. THE EVIL TO BE AVOIDED. "Lean not to thine own understanding."

 1. This is a prevalent evil. Men do it in all departments—business, politics, literature, and religion.
 2. This is a patent evil. It is clear to all. Reason shows it. History shows it. Individual experience shows it. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

*Legitimate use of the understanding:—*Trusting in the Lord does not mean that we may not use our own understanding, forming our plans with discretion, and with all possible foresight and precaution, and in pursuing our ends employing all suitable and legitimate means. There is a legitimate using of the understanding that is not chargeable with "leaning to it." While we use it we are to depend on God for

success, trust in the promises of His Word, and in the care and overruling direction of His providence. As dependence upon God for strength to resist temptation does not preclude our applying all the energy of our minds, so dependence upon Him for direction in our ways does not set aside the employment of our own prudence and sagacity. God is the Supreme Director of all events, whose concurrent will is essential to the success of every measure; without it all the thoughts of men are vain, turning out subversive of their own designs and subservient to God's. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.) *The understanding not strong enough to lean upon:*—A thing may be useful which we must not lean upon, lest it should break and let us fall; a reed from an osier-bed is very useful to make baskets, but you should not lean upon it. So our understandings are very useful, but the best of them are not sufficiently strong to lean upon. (Chicago Sunday School Teacher.) *The danger of following our own wishes:*—As we emerge from childhood, we learn to suspect the wisdom of our wishes. From some eminence in our pilgrimage we look back on the path, and see plainly how much of our trouble was caused by resolutely following our own will. We see how we sometimes turned aside from the true way because it seemed rough and circuitous; and how, in other places, attracted by the flowers or the scenery, we neglected the map and the sign-posts, and wandered among bogs and thickets, where we floundered in mire, or were torn with thorns; and to precipices, where we stumbled and were bruised, and might have perished. Thus, by bitter experience, we have learned that our will is not always the wisest. What we have prescribed to ourselves as medicine has proved to be poison; the cup we have clutched as sweeter than honey has become more bitter than gall. We resolved to take the helm into our own hands, and have struck on hidden rocks. We have gone where the moss was brightest, and the quagmire has nearly choked us. We have glided where the ice seemed smoothest, and it has given way in the moment of our greatest exhilaration. (Newman Hall.)

Ver. 6. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.—*Trust and guidance:*—We have here the sound counsel of a wide experience. I. AS CONTAINING THE MOST IMPORTANT PRECEPTS FOR LIFE. God claims from you here—1. The supreme affection of your heart. 2. The complete homage of your intellect. 3. The unswerving loyalty of your lives. Religion is not to be put on and off, it must pervade the life. II. AS SUGGESTING THE GREATEST DANGERS IN LIFE. 1. The fallibility of human counsellors. 2. The deceitfulness of our own hearts. III. AS PROMISING THE GREATEST BLESSINGS THROUGH LIFE. 1. Domestically. 2. Commercially. 3. Spiritually. (T. Campey.) *The nature of the Christian's trust in God:*—I. THE NATURE OF THE TRUST. 1. It must be intelligent. 2. It must be unlimited. 3. It must be constant. No trust is of any great value that is not uniform and abiding. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS TRUST IS MANIFESTED. 1. There is surrender to the Divine authority. 2. There is obedience to the Divine law. 3. There is submission to the Divine providence. 4. There is faith in the Divine promises. Contrast the man who leans on his own understanding with the man who trusts in God. The one leans on a broken reed, the other on the arm of Omnipotence. (Anon.) *The Christian's mainstay:*—I. SOMETHING TO LEAN UPON: "Trust in the Lord." 1. He is worthy of trust—kind, good, loving. 2. He is suitable to trust in—powerful, eternal, just. 3. He is able to be trusted in, for He is accessible, He invites all, He saves all who trust in Him. II. SOMETHING TO DISTRUST: "Lean not to thine own heart." 1. Nothing is more fickle. 2. Nothing is more frail. 3. Nothing is more deceptive. 4. Nothing is more wicked. III. SOMETHING TO ESTABLISH: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." "In all thy ways." There will be ways of sorrow. Acknowledge His hand. There will be ways of disappointment. Thank Him for the discipline. There will be ways of joy. Praise Him for His love. IV. SOMETHING TO CHEER: "He shall direct thy path." He will direct it in perfect wisdom; He will direct it in perfect goodness; He will direct it for our good and His own glory. How peaceful the prospect, and how safe and sure the journey of that man whom the Lord directs! (Homilist.) *Consult God first:*—Take one step at a time, every step under Divine warrant and direction. Ever plan for yourself in simple dependence on God. It is nothing less than self-idolatry to conceive that we can carry on even the ordinary matters of the day without His counsel. He loves to be consulted. Therefore take all thy difficulties to be resolved by Him. Be in the habit of going to Him in the first place—before self-will, self-pleasing, self-wisdom, human friends, convenience, expediency. Before any of these have been consulted,

go to God at once. (*C. Bridges, M.A.*) *The necessity for Divine guidance* :—

I. THE FILIAL ACKNOWLEDGMENT DEMANDED. 1. In what it consists. We must acknowledge God's supreme authority, and also His Divine wisdom and goodness. 2. In what manner this acknowledgment should be made. By going to the Divine Word for instruction; by prayer; and by obedience to His authority. **II. THE DIVINE GUIDANCE WHICH IS PROMISED.** 1. By enabling us to understand truth and the rule of duty. 2. By preparing and disposing the heart to obedience. 3. By a kind and wise providence. Application : 1. Do you complain that you have not such guidance? In all your ways you do not acknowledge God. 2. We must be sinful if we are in error. 3. The subject appeals to wanderers and backsliders. 4. The counsel is specially addressed to the young. (*Evangelical Preacher.*) *God to be acknowledged in all the affairs of life* :—There is no hardship in this. This injunction is aimed, not at the speculative atheism which denies that there is a God, but at the much more common practical ungodliness which keeps Him at a distance from human affairs. If the commandment had been, "Acknowledge God in the uncertain and difficult ways of life," it would have met with a more ready compliance. The large, and the formal, and the public men will submit to His decision; but the little, and close, and kindly they will keep to themselves. Let Him compass you about as the atmosphere embraces the earth, going into every interstice, and taking the measure of every movement. "Trust in the Lord at all times; pour out your hearts before Him." (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Acknowledging God* :—

I. A DIRECTION : "In all thy ways acknowledge Him." 1. It means to recognise God as our master, to accept Him as the sole arbiter of our lot, and publicly to acknowledge the position which we assume towards Him. 2. It means to take God into all our counsels, and listen to His authority in everything we undertake. This act will render it impossible for us to sin, for how can a man take a holy God unto his counsels for evil? 3. It means to acknowledge God in all our actions by seeking His blessing in their progress. It is not sufficient to begin well. It is only when God is sought at every step that we can walk in accordance with His will or progress safely or securely. 4. It means to cultivate a feeling of resignation, and to be willing to give up our own ways and desires to His demand. This is, indeed, the great test which determines whether we acknowledge God. It costs something, and hereby we prove our sincerity. It is hard to have to renounce the cherished desires of a lifetime. **II. THE PROMISE** : "And He shall direct thy paths." 1. That it is the only safe course we can pursue to allow God to direct us. Owing to our own ignorance and shortsightedness we cannot direct them ourselves. 2. That it is an utter impossibility for God to direct our paths unless we commit our whole ways into His hands. Faith and trust are the requisites for this happy consummation. 3. That the ultimate end of His direction will turn out a glorious triumph. (*Homilist.*) *Human dependence and Divine guidance* :—

I. THE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD IN ALL OUR WAYS SUPPOSES, AS A PRELIMINARY, THAT WHAT WE ARE ABOUT TO DO IS CONSISTENT WITH CHRISTIAN PRINCIPLE. Christian principle is on the side of everything that is high, and honourable, and pure in the character of man. A mean Christian, a dishonourable Christian, an impure-minded Christian, are associations of light and darkness unknown to Christian verity. **II. THIS ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD IS THE CONSTANT ACCOMPANIMENT OF A FILIAL SPIRIT.** The true child may not always understand, but will always obey the will of his parent. The filial spirit regulates the discordances between the understanding and the life. The religious man is a child. It is not enough for him to do child's work, he must do it in a child's temper. It is not enough for him to bear a child's discipline, he must bear it in a child's spirit. **III. THIS ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GOD IS ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED BY PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE.** Whether it is the cause or the effect of this obedience, it is not necessary to distinguish. There is a real practical obedience along with the utterance that expresses the acknowledgment. When may we hope that Divine direction is given in answer to prayer? Consider—1. The reflex benefits of prayer. 2. The arrangements of God's providence that secure an answer to prayer. To withhold prayer is to oppose the spiritual constitution of the universe. It is the refusal of obedience, of worship, of the acknowledgment of dependence, of confession, of supplication, and of thanksgiving; and we cannot imagine that to place ourselves at that distance from God is the way to secure eternal bliss. (*W. G. Barrett.*) *Duty and assurance* :—

I. THE DUTY ENJOINED. 1. The nature of this duty. By our "ways" and "paths" we understand the designs, aims, and intentions of our minds, together with our actions consequent upon them; our whole capacity of judging, designing,

resolving, and acting. To acknowledge God is to confess and own Him, according to all those several accounts and manifestations of Himself that He has given us.

2. The extent, scope, and latitude of the duty. It is not indeed capable of limitation, for unless our resignation shall be universal, it cannot be sincere. III. THE ENCOURAGEMENT OR THE MOTIVE THAT IS OFFERED TO THE PRACTICE OF IT. 1. The truth of the proposition, "He will direct thy paths." What is to be understood by this Divine direction? What confidence have we that God will make good His promise? 2. The force of the motive. Because He will vouchsafe to direct our paths, therefore in all our ways we should acknowledge Him. (*Dean Lambe.*) *What to acknowledge concerning God:—*I. HIS PRESENCE. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place." All except an atheist—a no God man—will admit this with their lips; few admit it in their lives. II. HIS POWER. He can do whatsoever He pleases. Nothing is impossible, nothing is too hard for the Lord. III. HIS PROMISES. The Bible is full of promises, suitable for all persons, and fitting into all circumstances. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Providence:—*Submission to Divine providence does not consist in a blind surrender of the will to the influence of circumstances. Many a time we persuade ourselves that our course is one of patient acquiescence in the will of God, when we do but drift in foolish idleness on the stream of life. This text introduces the subject of Divine providence as an essential truth in the practical creed of our daily life. In solving the problem of human life it is necessary to recognise the individuality of character and the liberty of will. A false humility has led to the virtual denial of this. Men have deemed it bestowing honour upon God to represent themselves as mere clay in the hands of the potter. This idea has been underlying much of the popular theology of the past, and, in some way or other, it seems to be underlying much of the popular theology of to-day. To be wilfully blind to our own capacity and character is to deny ungratefully the best gifts of God. It is to lose sight of the real purposes of our being. True self-examination is one of the chief wants of our time. Self-examination is real and true in proportion as it dispenses with the fallacious and often misleading appearances in the lives of others. Truth is relative. No two truths can possibly be antagonistic to, or inconsistent with, each other. We recognise the individuality of character and the liberty of the will, and in perfect consistency with this, we affirm the truth taught in the text. But what is it to acknowledge God? The relation of cause and effect holds good in the realm of spiritual life not less than in the material world. Rewards and punishments are not arbitrarily bestowed by Him who is "the Judge of all the earth." To "acknowledge" God is neither more nor less than to acknowledge the principles of truth and righteousness in all our ways. It is not to talk about religion, but to act it in the life. Not he who talks much about the gospel, but he whose every-day duties in business, in the family, and in the world are evidently influenced by the spirit and essence of the gospel, is the best evangelist. Thus to acknowledge God is to secure the guidance of His providence. Thus God has placed man's happiness, so to speak, in his own keeping; and by true submission to the Divine will man is able to "lay hold on eternal life." Surrendering ourselves to the guidance of holy and eternal principles, we are unconcerned about the future. Our delight being in the Lord—that is, in the integrity and holiness of His will—we know that He will give us the desires of our heart. (*F. Wagstaff.*) *How does God guide us?—*In acknowledging God we are not to trust enthusiastically to impressions, to dreams, to fancied voices, and inward suggestions. Far less are we to make a lottery of the Bible, opening it at random, and taking the text that first meets our eye as given us by God, and putting our own meaning upon it. We are to apply our understandings to the blessed volume of inspiration, that we may find its principles and precepts that bear upon our case, and give our hearts to prayer, for that influence of the Holy Spirit which is necessary to deliver us from all undue prepossessions and prejudices in examining it. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The acknowledgment of God:—*Such acknowledgment will not be a fruitless thing, it will have a practical effect. I. How GOD IS TO BE ACKNOWLEDGED. By a solemn and deliberate appeal to the great Disposer of all things for that aid and guidance which He alone can afford. This must involve—1. A real conviction that God rules the world. If God has no care for the concerns of this lower world, to acknowledge Him is useless; if He acts in all things quite independently of our conduct, acknowledging Him is an impertinence. 2. That we honestly admit to Him in each particular case that the matter is in His hands, and that it is ordered as He may see fit. This implies a course of thought just the very opposite of that which men commonly pursue in

the business of life. To them all concerns and events are godless just because they are godless themselves. 3. A sincere dependence on Him for direction and help. This is the practical bearing of our conscious reference to God. A real and earnest acknowledgment of God is a belief in His supreme and almighty government of the world; a devout reference to His presence in all the concerns in which we are called to act, a humble reliance on His Spirit and aid; and this is a state of mind to be maintained, continually carried into every scene of duty and conflict, and made a settled habit of thought and feeling in all our ways. II. HOW WILL GOD DIRECT OUR WAYS? If proof that He does were wanted the whole experience of His people in all ages would rise up in witness. The promise is of direction. It is not necessarily a complete deliverance, and much less a painless course of ease and prosperity. How will the direction be effected? Through the working of our own minds and the counsels of others; by opening new paths and placing fresh aids within our reach; by influencing our souls through the teaching of His Spirit, and preserving them from false signs by which they were wont to be led astray.

1. Often God leads us and we know not how, we cannot say by what means it is. 2. Often God leads us even by means of obstacles. 3. Often God leads us by means of delay. 4. Sometimes God even seems to guide our way by means of our enemies. (*J. M. Charlton, M.A.*)

God's direction:—Do nothing without God's direction in His Word. A man that had a house to build would in all things follow the direction of a skilful workman, lest he lose his cost. So let us follow God's guidance, or all our labour is lost. None desires to go astray out of his way, except he be first gone out of his wits. Every man will rather take a guide to direct him, and give money to that end. If we be careful to acknowledge God in our ways we shall not wander out of them, for we shall have a trusty guide. The Athenians conceived that their goddess Minerva turned all their evil counsels into good to them; the Romans thought their goddess Videlia set them again in the right way when at any time they were out. All this, and undoubtedly more, is done by the true God for all who commit their ways unto Him. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Acknowledging God in all our ways:—I. THE NATURE OF THE INJUNCTION. A practical acknowledgment is required; but this is founded on a firm belief of the existence and perfections of God. We acknowledge God in all our ways—1. When we live in obedience to His Word and commandments. 2. When we look to and trust Him for what we want, and implore His blessing on all we undertake. 3. When we acquiesce in and submit to His dispensations. 4. Acknowledging implies praising and gratefully adoring Him under a sense of His bounty and loving-kindness. 5. And seeking Him in and through His Son. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT

GIVEN US TO ACKNOWLEDGE GOD. 1. We shall be preserved by grace from fatal mistakes and errors. 2. We shall be conducted by God through all the difficulties and perplexities that may meet us. 3. We shall be well instructed in the way of duty and peace. (*S. Knight, M.A.*)

Piety in every-day life:—1. Bring religion into our ordinary conversation. 2. Into our ordinary employments. 3. Into all our trials. 4. Into our ordinary blessings. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Acknowledging God:—1. Acknowledge God as thy King, by conforming to His laws. 2. As thy Benefactor, by gratefully receiving His benefits. 3. As thy Father, by submitting to His paternal chastisements. 4. As thy Model, by striving to copy His perfections. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Divine guidance:—I. THE DUTY. 1. Acknowledge His wisdom. 2. His goodness. 3. His superintendence. 4. His faithfulness. II. THE PROMISE CONNECTED WITH THE DUTY. He will make our path straight and plain before us, and show in what way we ought to walk, and how we ought to act. (*W. C. Wilson, M.A.*)

Dependence:—The thought of an over-ruling Providence is the sweetest of all thoughts to the Christian. It is to him his stay, his comfort, and his assurance in this dark vale of tears. The best Christian is he that trusts most implicitly to the God of providence, the God of all His mercy. The Christian who truly loves Christ feels himself utterly dependent upon the strength of Christ. There are some men who go forth to their daily work from morning till evening as though there were no providence to guide them. Worldly-minded men have no recognition of a God, make no acknowledgment of a providence. I. MAN'S DUTY. The whole course of man's existence is a course of utter dependence, and for some mercy or favour he is every day required to give an acknowledgment. This feeling of dependence we must be conscious of every day we live. In every position of society we are mutually dependent the one upon the other. One class of society looks to another class, and even the queen upon her throne must ask her people for her annual supplies and revenues.

But there is a point at which dependence ceases. There is One above all others who owes nothing to any man, but contributes of His goodness to all men freely—One on whom all are dependent, and yet He Himself is independent of any. That is the God of heaven; the God of providence—the source of all our comfort; the author of every blessing; the giver of every grace, the spring of all our joys, the life of every delight. To acknowledge God we must—

1. Believe in the existence of God.
2. Use the power and privilege of prayer when we are in need, distress, affliction.
- II. God's PROMISE. He has pledged Himself in His own never-failing covenant, "I will direct thy paths." Are you not conscious that oftentimes Providence has turned your feet by a way you know not, and opened up to you new spheres of duty? The mercies past demand acknowledgment, and they encourage you to trust for mercies yet to come. If you feel any doubt, hesitation, perplexity, trouble, then come, like Hezekiah of old, and spread your want before the Lord; the ears of the God of Sabaoth love to hear the voice of him that prayeth. (*R. Maguire, M.A.*) *He shall direct thy paths*:—His direction will secure—1. Safety. 2. Happiness. 3. Endless progress. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The great duty of acknowledging God*:—I. THE DUTY ENJOINED. We are to carry out, in the actings of every-day life, the great principle that there is a Being above us, and that Being is the proper object of the love and confidence of His creatures. From the time we set out in life to the period of old age—in all the variety of circumstances in which we may be placed, whatever be our state, whether one of prosperity or one of affliction—in all our concerns, personal and relative, temporal and spiritual, in all that belongs to this world or that relates to the next—we should think of God, and thank God, and trust God, and pray to God for His counsel and grace. We are to see God in everything, and we are to do nothing without Him. This duty is set in opposition to the natural tendency of the human mind to draw wisdom from its own resources, and to rest satisfied with its own powers. This setting God before us, with that feeling of reverence which His great name inspires, is a barrier to the commission of sin. II. THE ENCOURAGEMENT GIVEN TO PRACTISE THIS DUTY. All our goings shall be under His guidance, if we own and seek His providence. With a special regard to the interests of the humble, trusting soul, He will open a path before it; He will lead it into that path by indications of His will, plain and evident. We are short-sighted. We miscalculate. We often fail. We are exposed to temptations. We want a counsellor. If we look for God we shall see God, and see Him as our Helper, Protector, and Guide, in the most remarkable manner. If we depend upon providences, in the use of means, we shall have providential actings in our behalf, times without number. God may not always lead us in the path that we ourselves would choose. Infinite Wisdom chooses the path, and Infinite Love bears us through it. The rugged way may be the right way, though we may not now be able to see it. The direction of a higher Power brought to your affairs will not only conduce to your spiritual interests, it will likewise prove the greatest temporal blessing. (*William Curling, M.A.*) *Trust in the Lord*:—Speaking broadly; there are two ways in which people pass through life. They pass through it remembering God, or they pass through it forgetting Him. God is out of sight to us all: the difference is that to some He is out of mind; by others He is really and truly constantly thought of. We are all mixed up together for the present: those who are passing through the world looking to God, and leaning on His arm, and those who have no help but what their own strength gives them, and no hope beyond this world. We are all mixed up together—nay, the two ways are mixed up very often in ourselves; we seem to pass from one to the other, from forgetting God to remembering Him, from trusting Him to trusting only this world; we have Him in mind one hour, we lean unto our own understanding the next. Yet, in spite of all this, there are but the two ways; there is no mixing up of them in the eyes of God, who sees all clearly. Now, to which is our ordinary course in life most like? We must look close into our hearts and secret ways if we would not be deceived; if we really wish to know whether we are trusting to Almighty God's wisdom and strength to help and guide us through our day's walk, or whether we are leaning to our own poor, weak understanding. One sure proof is in our private prayers. It is impossible that any one can really be acknowledging God—can be thinking of anything but worldly things—who does not pray by himself in secret, and pray every day regularly. Then, again, how do we pray? Do we make a reality of our prayers by giving our mind to them, and keeping our thoughts from wandering—by earnestly begging God to be merciful to us, and to take care of us,

in soul and body, both here and in eternity? Or do we pray only because we should feel uncomfortable if we had not said our prayers, but yet without really feeling that we need what we pray for? Another proof is our way of bearing disappointments—the crosses and vexations which come upon all of us in our turn as we go through life. Nothing shows more plainly than this whether we are indeed acknowledging the Lord in all our ways, for this discovers to us for certain whether indeed we believe that all things come from God's ordering; and also that there is nothing that He sends on us but He sends it out of love for our souls, out of the desire to do us good in the end. Another proof is the care we take to keep in order our words and our secret thoughts as we pass through the day. "Acknowledge Him in all thy ways," says the Scripture; and how should we acknowledge Him better than by showing how constantly what He loves and desires comes into our thoughts, and keeps us from saying and thinking what, if we sought only our own will, we should think and say. When, for love and fear of Him, we keep back a bitter or ill-natured word that no one knew we were going to say, then we do nothing for the praise of men, but we "acknowledge" Him in secret. When for fear and love of Him, we not only set a watch on our lips, but keep a guard also on our thoughts—drive away all things that we ought not to think about—check and keep down our passion when it is rising—then this is something which is meant only for His eye; for the eye of man cannot see what was in our heart, and would not have known anything about it if we had indulged our thoughts. But if we let our thoughts run riot, and say that no eye shall see them, and no one think the worse of us for them; if we prefer to say the first harsh or unkind thing that comes up to our lips when we are vexed or angry, instead of keeping it under, though it cost us a struggle; if we give our hearts liberty to long for, and run after, the good things of this world, and say that there is no harm in it; if we let our souls be burdened or surfeited with the cares or pleasures of this world; if we have no time for thoughts about God and our eternal state, and put them out of the way that we may give ourselves more completely to our worldly interests—if we do all this, how can any one deceive himself with thinking that he is acknowledging God in all his ways? (*Dean Church.*) *A recipe for the true enjoyment of life:—* Obedience to the known will of God is the condition which secures Divine direction in the paths of our life. I. THE IMPORTANT CONDITION. The presence of the Lord fills the universe, and you should—1. Acknowledge Him in your secret ways. Such presence should not be a dread to us. His is a kindly presence. 2. Acknowledge Him in your ways of thought. If the fountain be pure, the stream which flows therefrom shall be unstained. 3. Acknowledge God in your ways of business. The best partner we can have is our heavenly Father. 4. Acknowledge Him in your ways of pleasure. In all festivities. Wherever you go, whatever you do. 5. Acknowledge Him in your ways of dress. Instead of dressing to appear fashionable, dress to be Godlike, Christlike. 6. Acknowledge Him in the ways of social life. 7. Acknowledge Him in the ways of prayer, faith, praise, penitence, doing good, reading the Scriptures. II. THE SOUL-INSPIRING PROMISE: "He shall direct thy paths." 1. In the pilgrimage of life. 2. To the unrevealed future. 3. To the Cross of Calvary. 4. To the ever-flowing fountain of forgiveness. 5. To your place in heaven. (*William Birch.*) *Guidance:—*I. GUIDANCE IS TO BE HAD FOR THE JOURNEY. There are countless false paths, but no traveller needs to take any of them. God makes the minds of those whom He guides clear, so that they act wisely, and He makes their consciences sensitive and correct, so that they act rightly. II. HOW ARE WE TO GET THIS GUIDANCE? It will not be forced upon any one. No one can count upon getting God's guidance who does not seek it. This is the meaning of "acknowledge Him." It means "take notice of Him," consult Him, and obey His directions. Treat Him as you treat a guide. III. WHAT ARE "THE WAYS" IN WHICH WE MUST ACKNOWLEDGE HIM? 1. The course of life as a whole. It is well often to think of life thus as a unity, and ask where it is leading to. Is it not strange that men should undertake the longest journey of all without Him? 2. In each particular enterprise and action we engage in He is to be acknowledged. 3. In what goes before our actions—the imaginations and desires, the plans and purposes, we must acknowledge Him. 4. In what comes after our actions—habits. All of us have some bad habits, and many who consult God as to particular actions still let their formed habits guide them each along its own line. But here, too, He must be acknowledged, and by His grace the strongest habit can be broken. 5. Stress must be laid on the word "all." God will have our whole heart or He will have none of it. (*John Kelman,*

M.A.) Spiritual direction :—There have been many definitions of religion. It is one of the great and fascinating features of life which tempt description, just as the glory and charm of nature provoke representation in art. I am not going to add another definition. I am only going to say that for practical purposes our religion may be described as our response to the will of God. It is an obedience. When I have said that, I have said in the same breath that religion is not an easy thing, but a hard. If religion were not so commonly represented as an accommodation to the weak, it would be a mightier power in the world than it is to-day. Christian religion is not, in the first place, a concession to our weakness. It is an appeal to our strength. It is deep calling to deep. It is a summons to unite all that is within us. God does not address Himself to our weakness, but to our power, to our faith. His Church is the fellowship of the strong, or those who are growing strong, not of the weak, who hug their weakness and demand that the rest shall wait for them. Religion, I say, is a hard thing. Any appeal to our will is hard. To submit the will is the hardest thing man has to do. If religion were merely sympathy, it would not be so hard. Sympathising is easy. What is hard is to obey. Have you not discovered that? How easy it is to sympathise with Christ, to love one so lovely as Christ! How hard it is to obey Christ! Have you not found that obeying Christ is more hard than loving Him? Have you not observed that Christ asked for obedience much more than He asked for love? It was to our power of doing hard things that He appealed. It was to our strength He came, to side with that against our weakness. You must begin by taking Christ Himself. The one comprehensive expression of God's will is Christ. To respond to Christ is the first step in religion. It is the first comprehensive act of obedience to God's will. It is the first comprehensive surrender of your will to His. But that is a serious matter and a severe. It is not a mere thrill of sympathy with some of the lovelier features in Christ. You have not accepted Christ when you have felt you would like to love Him and serve Him. That is no act of will. What Christ did for you was more than that. He did not feel as if He would like to love and help and save you. That would have been a very sentimental salvation, no salvation at all, a mere piece of amiable religious failure. How does it look to say that Christ had a weakness, or tenderness, for mankind? Yet it is all that some forms of religion seem to recognise in Him. And to admit that you have a weakness for Christ, is that religion, faith? Yet it is all that you have in some forms of religion which have much to say about sympathy with Christ and little about obedience, about self-committal. To love much that is in Christ is one thing, but to wed Christ, give yourself to Him for good and all, take Him for better or for worse by a decisive act of loving will and total life—that is another thing and a greater. How are we to let God direct our path? When will He direct it? If this verse be true, it is when in all our ways we acknowledge Him. What does that mean? Push your inquiries. Do not swallow texts whole. There are forms of acknowledging God in all our ways which do not seem to win the blessing promised here. A man may be very pious in his habits, and feel no shame or backwardness in acknowledging God in connection with his daily pursuits. He may be particular about family worship, about saying grace, about church-going, about obliging his servants to go to church, about thanksgiving for prosperity, about giving God a portion of his income, about making a ready and sometimes even effusive recognition of religion in his manner of speech, his churchly feeling, his philanthropic energies. In plenty of cases all this is quite sincere, in some it is not. It is sometimes combined with ways of business which excite comment, or a habit of mind which does not adorn the faith. But, whether sincere or not, it has this feature. The man stands in his own ways and acknowledges God. The acknowledgment of God is an extra something joined on to the pursuit of his ways, joined on to the rest of his activities as the Sunday and its engagements are attached to the rest of the week. Now, if this is sincere it is something to be thankful for. But it is hardly, perhaps, the kind of thing which makes a man sure of the direction of God in all he may go on to do or design. Again, there are some people who are most unselfish in all their thoughts and acts, people whom it is a happiness to know, and who are a rebuke sometimes to our own selfish ways. In spite of their absence of self-seeking they are not so directed in their paths that they become directors of conscience to others. Some, I mean, with less unselfishness have a moral judgment that we should trust more. To say the truth, unselfishness is sometimes a negative kind of virtue. There are people who are more unselfish than obedient. They do not think of themselves, but—they have not the secret of the Lord. They are not

self-willed, but they have not the insight into the will of God. We speak of the sinlessness of Christ, and I fear it often means something colourless and negative. It keeps us from thinking as we should about the positive and complete obedience of Christ. And so with the unselfishness of some sweet souls. It is more the absence of self than the presence of God or the secret of His Spirit. Again, when we think of God directing our path, what do we mean? When you look for God's guidance on a difficult matter what is it you expect? Do you expect to hear, as it were, a voice in your soul's ear saying clearly, as if some one called in at your window, "Yes, do this," "No, don't do that"? Do you expect to see in a vision of the night a beckoning figure? With cases like St. Paul before us, or even Joan of Arc, how can we deny that God has taken in special instances that way of revealing His will? But where would missions have been if the missionaries had waited till they saw the beckoning of some man of Macedonia in the dead of night? No. The commentary on the text is, "Whoso shall do the will of God shall know the doctrine," or "My judgment is just, because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." We must not only acknowledge God in our ways, but by our ways. We must not only pursue our own ways and interests, and add to that an occasional further acknowledgment of God; but our ways and business themselves must be the acknowledgment of God—the doing of His will. Life must be obedience, service. And in a life so lived there grows up a habit of mind which increases in the power of discerning God's will and receiving His direction. As we pursue this obedience there grows up in us a mind conformed to Christ's, a fellowship of the Spirit, a faculty of judgment which has the life secret of the Almighty. Our natural powers work. Our rational judgment is alive. We bring our reasonable faculties to bear on things. And yet within all there is a moral sympathy, a moral affinity with the Spirit of God, which guides our judgment almost insensibly. Our affection and devotion, guide, shape, colour our views. Christ had no visions. It was His judgment that acted always in His perception of God's will. But it was a judgment leavened by all His love of the Father, by all the obedience of His past. He steered by the compass of the Spirit. He never followed wandering fires. He did not act from suggestions in a trance. His human judgment was quickened by the Divine Spirit. It was not in abeyance. He divined God's will not by His human weakness, but by His human strength. God directed His path through the exercise of His native powers, raised to superhuman insight by the intense purity and perfectness of His obedience at every stage. Everything He did gave Him power for seeing and doing His next thing. Every way He took so acknowledged God's will that the direction of God never failed His path. Do not fall into the habit of expecting calls and impulses of a distinctly preternatural, miraculous, magical sort at your decisive steps in life. So live that the faculties that God gave you to read His will may be pure and fit for their work. If your eye be single, your body will be full of light. Obedience is the secret of just judgment in the will of God. Learn the habit of worshipping Christ in spirit and in truth. That is the school and practice for that judgment which sees God's will, kindles to it, follows it, perceives it for others, and makes you a guide, antagonist, and helper to their weakness. There are many great cases in history where sanctity has given a penetration of judgment which baffled policy and puzzled shrewdness. And in the great affairs of the world the right judgment in the long run will reside with the men or the Church that best succeeds in holiness, in fine and deep obedience. Dwell much with God, and you acquire God's habit of mind. Then take your honest share in the world, and you learn to read the world with God's eye. Go into action, and you perfect yourself by practice in the art of interpreting God's guidance for life. (*T. P. Forsyth, D.D.*) *The hand on the helm:—*

My bark is wafted to the strand
By breath Divine;
And on the helm there rests a hand
Other than mine. (*Dean Alford.*)

*A safe pilgrimage:—*Religion is not a mere sentiment; it is a life. A man is known by his "ways." I. THE CONDITION MENTIONED. 1. "Acknowledge Him." (1) By shaping thy course according to His Word. His Word is His law. (2) By real and constant prayer. (3) By faith in the Divine promises. 2. "In all thy ways." (1) In thy enterprising ways. Seek first the blessing of the great Disposer of events—like Jacob at Bethel, Moses in his mission,

and Solomon in the temple. (2) In thy prosperous ways. (3) In thy ways of adversity. There will be cross-ways: acquiesce, and glorify God. II. THE ASSURANCE GIVEN: "He shall direct thy paths." 1. By removing obstructions. How often to the faithful He reveals surprising grace, as in the case of Nehemiah, Daniel, &c. 2. By preventing mistakes. Better if Jonah had acknowledged God; and Peter would once have saved himself bitter tears. Keep close to the Cloud and the Pillar. 3. By preserving from ruin. How came a portion of Israel to perish? and Ananias? Remember Lot's wife, and beware. Be ever faithful, and God will keep thy feet in heaven's pathway. Conclusion: 1. Now sinner, go thy way and acknowledge God for the first time on thy knees. 2. Christian brother, resolve to set the Lord continually before thee. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *I will direct his ways*:—It is like a child sitting in a boat; he does not know the coast, nor how to row; and his right hand, being a little stronger than the other, the boat would be constantly turning round and round. He would be carried away and lost if there were no guiding power in the boat. But there in the stern sits his father, whose steady hand overcomes the uneven strokes, and the boat keeps the right course. So that the force exerted by the child, though misdirected, all works for good when the father guides. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The folly of a self-directed life*:—Have you acknowledged God yet in your life? Are you a converted man? Is your own self-will gone? Have you passed the reins of the nervous steed of your life into the hands of Him who can drive without a spill; or are you clumsily taking the reins into your own hand, and trying to drive these horses that have a career before them beside which that fabled career in Grecian mythology sinks into insignificance? The myth says that Sol's son stole the chariot of his father, and in one blazing career he attempted to drive the horses of the Sun. It was his death. I rather think the old Greeks had a hold on life when they thus spake. I rather think they were feeling after the gospel when they said to the young heart, "Never try to handle the ribbons of the chariot of the Sun, that great circle of the heavens. Never try to ascend the blazing steps of the throne of light, or it will be your death." Oh, young man! I beseech you, do not attempt to drive the horses of your life. You cannot do it. Many a man as strong in the muscle and nerve as you are has failed. In the paragraphs of human life you read this, if you read anything—that life, if it is to be a success, must be handed over in humility of spirit to a mighty God, the giver of life to the soul. Have you yet made the grand decision? (*J. Robertson.*) *Life a labyrinth*:—One of the great wonders of the world was the Egyptian Labyrinth. Herodotus tells us of a visit he made to this place. There were three thousand chambers in it; and when you had entered, the difficulty was to get out. The rooms were like one another, the passages were devious, and tortuous, and winding; and you might wander in the Egyptian Labyrinth till you died, and never be able to get out. They said, "This maze is the wonder of the world!" The Egyptian Labyrinth is nothing to this life in the way of a maze. I have been at the ball under the cross of St. Paul's, in London, when the day was clear. I shall never forget how the city looked as it lay at my feet. Those streets on streets, those lanes and crosses, and avenues and roads—they lay in a perfect maze, in a labyrinth, before me. One felt how easy it would be to lose oneself in the London streets, they are so many, the place is so perplexing. No man can tell you about all these streets. He knows his one little bit. It is only as you stand and look down on the great living maze of the colossal city that you apprehend its vastness. Ah! this life of ours is worse. As you ascend the hill-top, and look down on the streets, and ways, and lanes, and roads of life, you say, "God help me! How can any man thread his way through this confusion?" (*Ibid.*) *Acknowledging God*:—When the old Spanish mariners, in their explorations, touched any new land, the first thing they did was to run the flag of Ferdinand and Isabella to the masthead on the highest point that they could reach on the new land. Every new shore was claimed for Spain. The sovereigns that encouraged the explorations of these Spanish mariners were acknowledged when the first foot touched the new shore. Ah, man! when you get your new situation, when you set up your new home, when new circumstances arrive in your life, it is grand to run up the flag of God's Son, and say, "This new situation—this new era in my life—will be the acknowledgment of God in the person of His Son." (*Ibid.*) *The value of prayer for Divine guidance*:—Two men had been friends since their early boyhood. One is now a successful merchant, who is known for his honour, probity, and high Christian character. The other is a lawyer, a man of integrity and good standing in the community also, but a disbeliever in God and His providence. The

two men had been talking about the efficacy of prayer; and the merchant, urged to speak from his own experience, had confessed that he took this text literally: "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths." "I never make a large purchase of goods, or plan any important change in my business," he proceeded to explain, "without first asking special Divine guidance." The lawyer smiled. "Oh, yes, I understand," he replied. "But your phenomenal success can all be explained in a natural way. For instance, most men act impulsively sometimes—yield to their whims, or to ideas suddenly conceived. You escape this danger through your system of praying before you act. The prayer gains you a little time. Besides, your feeling of reverence for the Being you worship has in itself a tendency to clear your mind of prejudices, to restore your balance, and to make you a reasonable, logical person—otherwise, a good business man." A light broke over the merchant's face, and he was glad to have his friend's testimony to the value of prayer, notwithstanding his unspiritual and inadequate way of seeking to explain it. (*Sunday Companion*.)

Ver. 7. **Be not wise in thine own eyes.**—*Self-conceit* (see Isa. v. 21):—I. IT INVOLVES SELF-IGNORANCE. No one who knows himself could be conceited. Let the wisest man think of two things—1. His knowledge in comparison with what is to be known. 2. His knowledge in comparison with what he ought to have known. II. IT OBSTRUCTS MENTAL IMPROVEMENT. This is clear from two things—1. That mental improvement requires an earnest seeking for knowledge. 2. Earnest seeking for knowledge requires a deep sense of the necessity of knowledge. A self-conceited man feels no such necessity; he thinks he knows everything. II. IT DESTROYS SOCIAL INFLUENCE. A self-conceited man disgusts rather than pleases, repels rather than draws. He is despised rather than respected. Intelligence, generosity, truthfulness, humility, these are the elements of social power. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The folly and danger of self-conceit*:—I. WHAT ARE THE USUAL SIGNS, IN YOUNG PEOPLE, OF THEIR SETTING TOO HIGH A VALUE UPON THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING? 1. In a general inattention to the means of instruction and improvement. 2. A spirit of contradiction strongly marks this failing. It is a strong symptom of self-conceit when young people are hasty in their judgments, and confident in their own opinions. 3. When, even in matters of importance, they are above asking or taking advice of others. 4. By rashly condemning the opinions and maxims which have received the stamp of time and experience. Youth should guard against the fascinations of novelty. 5. The worst sign is neglecting to ask counsel of God (Jas. i. 5). II. WHENCE IS IT THAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE PECULIARLY EXPOSED TO THIS EVIL? 1. They commonly know but little of themselves. 2. They can have but little acquaintance with the world. 3. They are much exposed to the imprudent and sinful flattery of others. III. SOME CONSIDERATIONS TO PUT YOUTH SERIOUSLY UPON THEIR GUARD AGAINST BEING WISE IN THEIR OWN EYES. 1. Consider what little foundation there is for this vain conceit. 2. Nothing obstructs progress in true wisdom more effectually than the opinion that you are wise already. 3. If you are wise in your own eyes, you will not be so in the sight of God and man. 4. Nothing more surely betrays young people into certain ruin. Guard, then, against self-conceit. Watch and pray constantly against the spirit that works in character and life such fatal mischief. (*John Humphrys, LL.D.*)

Ver. 9. **Honour the Lord with thy substance.**—*The highest giving, the condition of the highest getting*:—I. THE HIGHEST GIVING. 1. Giving to the Best Being. 2. Giving the best things to the Best Being. The surrender of self is essential to give virtue and acceptance to all other contributions (Rom. xii. 1). II. THE HIGHEST GETTING. By giving this you get back—what? The choicest and fullest Divine blessings. 1. He who yields his all to God attends to the conditions of all true prosperity—industry, temperance, economy, forethought, &c. 2. He who yields his all to God will insure the special favour of Heaven (see Heb. vi. 10.) (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *Giving, a privilege*:—This rule of sacrifice is a costly precept to the worldling and the formalist; but to the servant of God it is a privilege to lay aside a portion of substance with a sacred stamp on it, bearing the inscription, "This is for God." Well may we think our substance due, where we owe ourselves. (*C. Bridges, M.A.*) *The duty of honouring God with our substance*:—I. A DUTY ENJOINED. Honouring the Lord with our substance. 1. We are to honour God in the expenditure of our substance upon causes of piety and benevo-

lence. Our money—even our time, our health, our talents—is not our own. The humblest and the greatest are but stewards. Whatever they have is a trust. 2. God is to be first considered in the distribution and expenditure of our means. Our general plan is to see whether we have anything left for God. To honour the Lord is our positive, our first, duty. 3. Charitable and religious expenditure should be systematic. II. A PROMISE ANNEXED TO THE DISCHARGE OF THE DUTY: “Thy barns be filled with plenty.” Expenditure here is gain. Have faith in God. “There is that scattereth and yet increaseth.” Christian liberality is gain, because it is giving unto the Lord. You cannot lose by faith, you cannot lose by obedience. Do not narrow too hastily, too selfishly, too covetously, the limits of what you think you can spare. Shrink not from self-denial. The test for us is our comparative expenditure for self and for God. (*John C. Miller, M.A.*) *Honouring the Lord with our substance*:—Under the old dispensation the Divine directions respecting religious observances and the use of property were more precise and definite than they are under the new. With the Jew it was in no sense optional whether or not he should contribute to the maintenance of the institutions of religion, nor whether he should contribute little or much. Under the Christian dispensation giving is voluntary. This may weaken the sense of obligation in many minds. I. THE DUTY HERE ENJOINED. We do not honour the Lord with our substance when we use it for purposes of display or of self-gratification. God is honoured—1. When we relieve the physical wants of our fellow-creatures. 2. By devoting it to the maintenance of gospel institutions. 3. By employing it for the diffusion of the gospel in the benighted portions of the earth. II. THE PROMISE BY WHICH WE ARE ENCOURAGED TO PERFORM THE DUTY. (*W. M. Birchard.*)

Ver. 11. **Despise not the chastening of the Lord.**—*Chastisements disciplinary*:—The text is a kind of condensation of practical wisdom for the direction of life. It has reference to those dealings of God with men which have a stern and severe aspect, which are in themselves painful and unwelcome, and under which the human soul cannot well be satisfied or sustained aside from the two considerations, first, that they are the appointments of God, and second, that they are designed to be instrumental of our good. One of the most striking and unusual marks of human destiny is to be found in the afflictive dispensations which trouble us. The general counsel of the text is aimed at one of the common errors of men, viz., not being affected by our trials in a wise and beneficial manner. I. CONSIDER OUR AFFLICTIONS AS CHASTENINGS, CORRECTIONS. 1. They are of God, and God takes no pleasure in the miseries of His creatures. They must be disciplinary—a part of the discipline of His love. It is a wonder that God should love us at all; no less a wonder than that, loving, He should afflict us. 2. The rule or order of human afflictions indicates their corrective intent. All of them do not come under this principle, indeed, but many of them do. God makes the miseries of life follow close and visible the sins and crimes of life to a very wide extent. They follow the sins of individuals and of nations. But we cannot rank all miseries under this rule. If we could know as God knows all the secondary causes which He employs, it is extremely probable that we should attribute many human miseries to human sin which we now attribute to the just and naked sovereignty of God. Whenever we can see the connection, and trace our unhappiness to a fault, that unhappiness is clearly the blow of a rod of discipline. 3. A state of entire innocence would have kept the world from all suffering. 4. The nature of our afflictions has in it something very remarkable. They are not so heavy as to crush us. They have many accompanying alleviations. For the most part we are able to bear up under them. They are not destructive, they must be disciplinary. 5. Consider the manner in which our afflictions ordinarily come upon us. They commence gently, and if the chastised do not amend, they are increased. 6. The alleviations which accompany earthly afflictions furnish almost a demonstration that the afflictions are designed for amendment. II. THE IMPROVEMENT OF THIS SUBJECT. It becomes us, who have so many distresses to bear, to consider well the design of them. The world we live in, with its mingled chastisements and mercies, perfectly accords with the declarations of the gospel, that God is displeased, but waits to be gracious. And we shall soon have done with this system of disciplinary affliction for ever. (*I. S. Spencer, D.D.*) *Life a discipline*:—People sunk in heathenism do not trouble themselves about the true meaning of life. They are at the unreflective age of experience. They are in a position of ignorance or indifference with respect to the moral and religious aspect of man's life. But with the rise and growth of reflection the significance of

existence comes to the front, and presses in upon the mind, sometimes with painful urgency. This inquiry seems to us, who have eighteen centuries of Christian teaching, a comparatively easy one. But the answer varies to some extent with the individual. The attitude assumed towards God and the truths of revealed religion enters into the matter. This is seen by comparing the views of a sceptical and a believing person. The question as to the true interpretation of life was weighed and discussed by the wise and good men who wrote the Scriptures. Their conclusion was that life is, in part at least, disciplinary in its nature. Its hindrances, trials, sufferings are connected with the fatherly goodness of God, and offer opportunities for spiritual growth and improvement which would otherwise be impossible. This idea is, however, associated in most minds with the severer dispensations of Providence, and with these alone. But it really runs through life. The world is so constituted as to be a school of training for the human spirit. The moral government of the world gives clear evidences that God wills other ends than happiness, ends that even involve the present loss of happiness. I. THIS BROADER AND DEEPER ASPECT OF THE MATTER IS DISCLOSED IN THE RELATIONSHIP SUBSISTING BETWEEN MAN AND NATURE. In the natural world the fullest scope has been left for effort, inquiry, perseverance, diligence. Had the world, as created by God, given a premium to indolence and incapacity it would have given us no hint of a Divine purpose underlying our life, but constituted as it is, it forces us to the conclusion that life was meant to be disciplinary in its character. II. THIS TRUTH IS REVEALED IN OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH MEN—WITH SOCIETY. The moral law, which is our guide to duty, is stamped upon the consciences of men, so that there is no excuse for ignorance regarding it. But though the abiding principles of God's kingdom are plain and undeniable, they do not save us from the trouble of thinking. The very difficulty of doing the right thing, we know, is a sign of the moral purpose underlying our life. Life is a discipline, but life may not be in any true sense a discipline to this individual and to that, because so much depends upon the attitude of the soul to God, and to His will. It remains with each man to enter into God's redeeming purpose, and to become a fellow-worker with Him. (*Morison Bryce.*)

Despising God's chastenings.—I. WHAT IS IT TO DESPISE THE CHASTENINGS? 1. To receive them without any emotion. Trials should be felt; the heart should smart under the rod. 2. To fail to look into the cause of them. When afflictions come men seldom seriously set themselves to see why God contendeth with them. 3. To fail to be altered and improved by them. If a child is not better for his parent's discipline, we say that correction has been thrown away upon him. II. WHAT IS IT TO BE "WEARY OF HIS CORRECTION"? 1. It is the fault of those who make too much of their afflictions. Some are "swallowed up of overmuch sorrow." It overwhelms, stupefies, consumes them. They brood over every circumstance of the stroke which has befallen them, and see it in the most aggravated light. Their imaginations even add to the reality. The believer, when he meets with sorrow, should consider the bright as well as the dark side of the Lord's dealings with him. It is the sore temptation by which sufferers are sometimes exercised to be led to doubt, because of their suffering, that they are objects of the Lord's interest. 2. It is the fault of those who rebel against the correction, who fret and murmur at the stroke. We weary of correction—3. When we cannot wait the Lord's time for the removal of our trials. We almost long to take the times out of His hands, and arrange things for ourselves. As trial never comes a day too early, so it never stays a day too long. We have afflictions to sustain, trials to endure; but we have a God of all comfort to make those trials easy. (*A. Roberts, M.A.*)

Right conduct under affliction.—I. WHAT MUST BE OUR CARE WHEN WE ARE IN AFFLICTION? 1. We must not despise an affliction, be it ever so light or short, as if it were not worth taking notice of; or as if it were not sent on an errand, and therefore required no answer. We must not be stocks or stones, insensible of them. 2. We must not be weary of an affliction, be it ever so heavy or long, nor faint under it; nor be dispirited, nor driven to use indirect means for our relief and redress of our grievances. We must not think that the affliction either presses harder, or continues longer than is meet, nor conclude that deliverance will never come because it does not come so soon as we expect it. II. WHAT WILL BE OUR COMFORT WHEN IN AFFLICTION? 1. That it is a Divine correction. 2. That it is a fatherly correction. Afflictions not only consist with, but flow from, covenant love. They are so far from doing any real hurt, that they become the happy means of sanctification. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Chastening.—The course of human life is a course of chastening. It is not a word confined to the vocabulary of religion. But

chastening seems to be unequally distributed. There is a possibility of treating godly chastisement in an ungodly spirit. It may be despised, or it may be endured with impatience. God's purpose requires time for its exposition and realisation; and we require patience to abide its complete unfoldment. Patience often accomplishes what the most overwhelming strength could never effect. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Moral beauty the result of chastening*:—Scarcely any gem reveals its true beauties in a natural state. The diamond in the rough is most unattractive, and would be thrown away by a casual observer as a worthless pebble; its perfections are hidden under a hard crust, which can only be removed by its own powder. The deep velvet hues of the sapphire, the glowing brilliant red of the ruby, the soft clear green of the emerald, and the delicate strata of the onyx, alike only display themselves in their true character after the lapidary has used his skill in cutting them into facets and polishing them; and on the perfection of this operation depends in a great measure the beauty of the gem. As it is with these, so it is also with human gems. (*Scientific Illustrations.*) **Neither be weary of His correction.**—*Suffering in its bearing on conversion*:—The text assures that there is nothing in our present affliction that need make us despair. Suffering is altered in character as soon as we enter into possession of the Divine favour. It is no longer absolute and irremediable; it forms part of the plan of Divine love. It has not, however, ceased to bear its character of chastisement. How does affliction help us to realise the Divine love? 1. It acts as a dyke against the overflow of evil, it incessantly restrains and thrusts it back. Pain is a restraining and preserving power in this sinful world. 2. It acts as a preparative. Suffering, under the influence of grace, fills up the infinite distance between man and the Cross. It was the suffering of a God who humbled Himself that saved us; and it is suffering dispensed by this same God which prepares the sinner to believe in the crucified One. Suffering also makes us seize the salvation thus wrought for us, but which must be consummated in us. It must, therefore, pursue its work on this redeemed earth, where sin still dwells. (*E. De Pressensé, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. For whom the Lord loveth He correcteth, even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.—*The characteristics of fatherly chastisement*:—The paternal relation is frequently ascribed to the Almighty, as that in which He stands to His people and servants. This reminds them that they are placed by Him under discipline, and that, if they offend, they must expect to receive chastisement. **I. A FATHER WILL CHASTISE HIS SON WITH RELUCTANCE.** He will try all other means first. When he does chastise it will be as one that yields to a painful necessity. So God "does not afflict willingly." We cannot explain the reasons of the distinctions which are made by Divine Providence, apparently without respect to differences of character in the subjects of them. There are circumstances lying too deep for human view, which justify God's ways. **II. A FATHER WILL CHASTEN HIS SON WITH TENDERNESS.** He may be severe, he will not be cruel. When God chastens, it is in tenderness; when He sends affliction, He mitigates its severity, and does not permit it utterly to lay waste our comforts. His afflictions leave no permanently injurious effects. **III. A FATHER WILL CHASTEN HIS SON WITH A VIEW TO HIS PROFIT.** The good of his child is his great and ultimate object. God has many gracious ends to serve by affliction. It may be designed—1. To restrain us when we are ready to enter on sinful courses. 2. They may operate as seasonable mementoes in regard to the insecurity of our state here, and the necessity of preparing to meet our God. 3. They may be designed to try and call into exercise Christian graces, to wean our affections from the world, to awaken holy desires after God and heaven. (*James Henderson, D.D.*)

Vers. 13–26. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom.—*Wisdom*:—**I. THE PLEASURES OF WISDOM.** 1. Present happiness. 2. Lasting happiness. **II. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF WISDOM** (vers. 14–18). Many figures are employed to set forth the preciousness of wisdom. **III. THE POSSESSION OF WISDOM.** 1. Its reception (ver. 18). This laying hold implies earnestness and determination. Heavenly wisdom will never be the portion of the man who has "no heart to it" (chap. xvii. 16). 2. Its retention (ver. 21). The crown jewels in the Tower are guarded and closely watched. Iron bars exclude the stranger from a too near approach to them, and jealous eyes watch his movements as he is permitted to look at them. So let us guard the "Pearl of great price." The only hand that can hold fast the pearl of wisdom are those of "faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. i. 13).

Compare "The Lord . . . shall keep" (ver. 26). IV. THE PATTERN OF WISDOM (ver. 19). V. THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM. (*H. Thorne.*) *The happiness of the pious*:—It is a great mistake to suppose that the pious man is only to be blest; he is blest already. I. PEACE OF CONSCIENCE. The possession of the entire world, with all its honours and pleasures, would be but a mockery to him who feels the lash of an accusing conscience. While on the other hand, to him who is at peace with himself there is a sweet and ample solace under whatever external evils may befall him. This peace, however, is not to be confounded with another state of mind nearly resembling it. There is a sense of security in regard to spiritual and eternal things which springs not from religion, but from the want of it. It results either from infidel or deistical principles; or from the power of sinful appetites and passions which shut out all serious thoughts; or from false ideas of the mercy of God; or, again, from men's most erroneous conceptions of their own character. How different the peace of the children of God! It is intelligent, and well-grounded, and Scriptural. It admits the existence of sin and punishment, of death and of hell. Truly pious men generally have profounder impressions of these realities than any others. But at the same time they look with faith to an all-sufficient Redeemer; and in the merits of His obedience and death they see ample reason for confidence and hope. II. THE UNION OF INCLINATION AND DUTY. The pious have this characteristic, that they not only pursue the path of rectitude, but delight in it as being not merely their duty, but their choice. They have a new spiritual relish, which makes religious duties as attractive to them as books are to a scholar, as parade-day is to a soldier, or as gay amusements are to the children of fashion. III. COMMUNION WITH GOD. The pious man withdraws from outward and worldly things, and seeks intercourse with his God. And who shall tell the joy and peace of the communion thus gotten? It is pure, heavenly, Divine. IV. CONFIDENCE IN PROVIDENCE. One of the chief evils of this world is its uncertainty. Its fashion is continually passing away. Now, amid all these proverbial vicissitudes of this world, there is only one man who can walk with a charmed life, *i.e.*, the wise or pious man. He knows not, nor does he want to know, what may befall him; but he is sure nothing shall happen to him which is not sent by a Divine hand, which is not wisely and kindly intended, and which shall not, in the end, minister to his eternal blessedness. How happy is the man who has found this wisdom; who can and does thus habitually regard God! How free from care and anxiety his bosom! V. THE HOPE OF HEAVEN. Hope is often spoken of as the one great blessing of man which survived the ruins of the fall. There is, however, an objection sometimes offered to this statement. "If this be so," it is said, "then Christians ought to be distinguished by a uniform sense of contentment and peace; they should be the happiest of mortals: whereas frequently the reverse of this is the case." The objection is fair, and we purpose to answer it fairly. First, then, all professed Christians are not such in reality; and, of course, it is no wonder that nominal believers should have only nominal joy. But, secondly, many real children of God are constitutionally of a gloomy or desponding temperament. But, thirdly, a great many, of whom we may hope that the root of the matter is in them, feel and show but little of the happiness we have spoken of because of their weak faith and careless living. The most beautiful landscape conveys no pleasure to the man who does not see it. The largest promises mean nothing to him who does not know or believe that he has some title to them. And hence the disquietude of many of whom it would be harsh to say they had no interest in Christ. (*T. W. Chambers.*) *The value of wisdom*:—I. ONE WAY OF LEARNING WISDOM (vers. 11, 12). By means of "the chastening of the Lord"; that is, of instruction through chastisement. There are some who will heed no other voice but this. Many a life that has been frivolous or selfish or indifferent to spiritual things has been led into the path of wisdom by affliction. God would not let chastening come unless we had something yet to learn. When it does come, therefore, it behoves us to listen patiently and reverently. II. THE BLESSEDNESS OF WISDOM. This is expressed in the way which would mean most to an Oriental. To him things to be desired would be ornamental, like silver, fine gold, rubies (or pearls). And then he is allowed to let his imagination run riot. Let him think of anything in the world which he would like to possess very much, wisdom is still infinitely more to be desired. Why is it blessed to choose Wisdom? In her right hand is length of days. What man wants is life itself. The pursuit of wisdom tends naturally to give a man longer life. The wise man, who serves God in quietude and simplicity, has an even, regular habit of life which tends to longevity. In her left hand are riches

and honour. We may not say that riches and honour always go to the good and never to the bad; but taking the world over, it pays to do right even from a worldly point of view. In the long run prosperity and honour go to those who deserve them. Where would you go to find those who truly enjoy life? To the epicure, the man of mental or bodily dissipation, the ungodly rich, the frivolous? Surely not. These lives do not contain the formula of peace. III. *THE SEAT OF WISDOM.* It is in God. The man seeking wisdom looks up to Him whose super-human wisdom is declared in every rain-drop and every grass-blade. Whoever earnestly wants to know how to live will somehow find his way to God. IV. *THE CONSEQUENCES OF RECEIVING WISDOM.* They are such as life, grace, safety, peace. The life of wisdom of the Old Testament finds its fulfilment in the life of the soul in Jesus Christ. The value of the Christian life is made clear by taking up such things as are sometimes supposed to be disadvantageous in it and seeing how they are transformed into blessings. Such things as these are supposed to be unpleasant in it: its definite committal, outspoken avowal, sacrifice of pleasure, loss of independence, irksome duties. But the life which turns its own seeming disadvantages into positive enjoyments must be the pleasantest life. Such is the life of the soul in Christ, who is made unto us the wisdom of God. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The value of wisdom:*—Here notice the writer's insight into the fundamental conception of human life. I. *LIFE AS A SCHOOL.* The word "chastening" might be rendered "instruction." It means the dealing of God with the human soul as a teacher deals with his pupil. This idea relieves God of the charge that He is angry with His children when sorrows fall upon them. We are not to "despise" this instruction, not to "weary" at this correction. II. *THE BEST LESSON TO BE LEARNED IN THIS SCHOOL IS WISDOM.* Not all in the school succeed in learning this. Wisdom is skill; it is enlightenment of the soul with respect to its relation to God and His world. It includes insight, judgment, and the highest qualities of the soul. With the richness of this inner life there comes true peace. III. *THIS WISDOM IS CREATIVE.* "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth." Wisdom is creative in man. He is a generator of moral influence wherever he may be. Some persons are reserve forces of righteousness. Such influence is creative. IV. *THIS WISDOM BEGETS FAITH.* It produces confidence in the unknown and untried. Knowledge of God, instead of creating doubt, inspires firmer hope and humble reliance. The further one sees into God's character the more serene and settled he is, because the progress in knowing God is progress in knowing goodness. (*E. S. Tead.*) *The religious and moral ends of knowledge:*—Here are described the effects of wisdom upon the honour and happiness of human life. I. *IN EVERY PERIOD OF LIFE THE ACQUISITION OF KNOWLEDGE IS ONE OF THE MOST PLEASING EMPLOYMENTS OF THE HUMAN MIND.* In youth there are circumstances which make it productive of higher enjoyment. II. *THE PURSUITS OF KNOWLEDGE LEAD NOT ONLY TO HAPPINESS, BUT ALSO TO HONOUR.* To excel in the higher attainments of knowledge, to be distinguished in those greater pursuits which have commanded the attention and exhausted the abilities of the wise in every former age is perhaps of all the distinctions of human understanding the most honourable and grateful. III. *KNOWLEDGE IS AT BEST ONLY A MEANS TO AN END.* Knowledge of every kind supposes some use to which it is to be applied. 1. To illustrate the wisdom and goodness of the Father of nature. 2. To secure the welfare of humanity. The benevolence of knowledge is of a kind as extensive as the race of man, and as permanent as the existence of society. 3. To improve our own minds. (*Archibald Alison, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. *For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.*—*The honour, profit, and pleasure of religion:*—It is an unquestionable truth, that to walk in the paths which God has enjoined, is to secure to ourselves the most perfect felicity which our present state will admit; and that our misery and unhappiness arise in proportion to our deviation from that "peaceful and pleasant path." If you are wise enough to lay hold of and retain this excellent wisdom—1. Honour shall be yours. 2. Profit shall be yours. Who can doubt of the advantages which will accompany our sincere profession of religion? Advantages in time and in eternity. 3. Pleasure shall be yours. Religion affords the mind the most complete and substantial satisfaction. (*W. Dodd, LL.D.*) *A gainful merchandise:*—Wisdom is compared and contrasted with other possessions. It is merchandise. There is a most pleasant excitement in the prosecution of mercantile enterprise. It gives full play to all the faculties. Those who prosecute have their wits more sharpened than other sections of the

community. The plans are contrived, and the calculations made. . . . What of the merchandise for a more distant country than that to which his goods are going—what of the traffic for eternity? Are there no careful calculations, no instructive longings, no vivid imaginings, as to its condition and progress? This merchandise is better and more gainful than any other. The world contains not any such promising field for speculation. It opens up a richer and surer market than any port of Time. It is a treasure that cannot be taken away. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The treasures of wisdom*:—Man is the only trading animal; commerce is his prerogative. The blazon of his trade, or exchange, is his patent of nobility. There is no distinction more honourable. There is no earthly title nobler than “a merchant”; and as such they are the controlling class in society—the chieftains and nobles of the later civilisation. Without them, there could be no division of labour, and consequently no accumulation of capital, and therefore no education, no literature, no science, no fine art, no true civilisation. The term “merchant” is altogether honourable and honoured, and therefore, and as such, is aptly metaphorical of a true Christian. Consider some points of resemblance. I. THE TRUE MERCHANT IS A MAN OF STRONG FAITH. Indeed, in regard of temporal things, he above all other men may be said “to walk by faith.” His barks are on the sea, and the sea is treacherous. His goods are consigned to men who may be plotting to defraud him. His ability to meet obligations depends on media of exchange, which some financial panic may paralyse in a moment. Yea, his “walk by faith” goes far beyond this. His business extends practically to the very ends of the earth, to lands he has never seen, and with races of men with whom he has never mingled. And thus in this walk by faith he is a fit emblem of a Christian. II. THE TRUE MERCHANT IS A MAN OF GREAT EARNESTNESS AND ACTIVITY. His faith is not an indolent trust, but an energising principle. III. THE TRUE MERCHANT IS A MAN PRACTICALLY AND PRE-EMINENTLY USEFUL. His wares are of real value—his labours sincere benefactions. Traced carefully back to their origin, to mercantile enterprise under God, must be ascribed all real human progress, from the hut and hunting spear of the earlier barbarism to the palaces and emporiums of the last civilisation. It is the merchant who has bridged the oceans and united continents; covered the seas with sails and the land with machinery. IV. ESPECIALLY IN THESE PARTICULARS MUST EVERY CHRISTIAN BE LIKE UNTO A MERCHANTMAN, FOR—1. He must be a man of strong faith. This is essentially and every way the foundation of his character. He must rely confidently for his salvation on another, and live ever in reference to the far-away and invisible. 2. A Christian must be an active and earnest man. That indolent reliance on Christ, which some men call faith, is a fearful delusion of the great adversary. While we can do nothing to merit salvation, yet we must do very much “to work out our salvation.” The high calling of God in Christ Jesus is not a lullaby over a cradle, but a great voice out of heaven saying, “Come up hither.” 3. A Christian must be a useful man. The law of his life is that of his Master, “not to be ministered unto, but to minister.” 4. But we are not to forget that while thus beneficent to other men, a Christian, like a merchant, is above all, and ineffably, benefiting himself. This, indeed, is the main truth set forth in the emblem. Mark the language, “The merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver.” It is implied here that this trading of the merchant in earthly products is good because profitable. But the Christian’s exchanging of temporal for eternal things is affirmed to be obviously better, because ineffably more profitable. (1) Because of the security of the transaction. All material commerce is manifestly with a hazard. But not so the spiritual. The Christian’s trust is in nothing finite, but in the living God. His bark cannot founder, for Christ sails with him. Thieves cannot steal his treasure, for it is laid up in heaven. (2) Because the treasure it secures is infinitely more valuable. This, indeed, is the great truth of the whole passage. We have here a most beautiful climax of all earth’s rarest and richest things. Silver, gold, rubies, all in their rarest purity and richest abundance, are declared to be of inferior value. Yea, the inspired penman affirms that “all things the human heart can desire are not to be compared with his.” And if you will remember that this is the testimony, not of some poor, unsuccessful man, but of Solomon—of Solomon, too, at a period of his experience when he had tested, as no other man ever did, the worth of all earthly things—not the utterance of one who, disappointed in his struggle for riches, pleasure, honour, turns in melancholy misanthropy away, to rail at the world and call it hard names, and scold from a hermit’s cell, or a priest’s pulpit; but of a crowned king in a palace, on a throne,

around whom the world delighted to gather all the prizes of life's mightiest triumphs, then you will take his testimony as demonstrated, that the treasure secured by Christian life is better than all the results of an earthly commerce. (*C. Wadsworth, D.D.*) *Wisdom for the children*:—This Book of Proverbs is a manual of conduct. It is not intended to make its readers learned men, but to make them wise men. We begin to be wise when we fear God, and to fear Him is always the chief part of wisdom. Some parts of the book are specially intended for the young. Its authors saw clearly that character is largely formed in childhood and youth. Hence strong emphasis is placed on the importance of the firm and wise discipline of children and young people; and there are grave and repeated warnings against the sins to which the young are specially tempted. If we are to achieve any great and enduring reformation in the condition of this country, and of the world, there must be an intelligent, a serious, a persistent endeavour to give to children and young people true conceptions of the possible dignity of human life, the gracious sternness of duty, the freedom and blessedness which are to be found in the service of God. Children are the salvation of the race. There is a new world created every thirty or forty years. There lies our hope. What ought we to teach the children? I. WISDOM. What they need to know for the conduct of life: how to live. Our first duty is to make God known to them. And the Christian method of doing that is to bring home to them constantly the great truth that having seen Christ we have seen the Father. All that Christ was, all that He said, must be accepted as containing disclosures of the life of the Father. The Christian conception of life is founded on the Christian gospel. Wisdom consists in a clear and just estimate of what are the true ends of life, and in the power to determine how life should be ordered so as to secure those ends, but for this we must know what God's relations to us are. The great Christian truths have a direct relation to life; they determine the laws of life; they are the forces which enable us to fulfil those laws. II. UNDERSTANDING. This denotes the power of accurate discrimination between things which may seem to be alike; in this sense, understanding is one of the aids and instruments by which wisdom is able to direct conduct. In most men the perception of duty is often dim and uncertain. Men who mean to do right do wrong because they cannot clearly see the line by which right and wrong are separated. Therefore the plain duties of human life and relationship should be taught to children. The duties of industry, truthfulness, equal justice, temperance, patience, fortitude, good temper, courtesy, and modesty. Much more in the way of direct moral instruction, for securing a proper "understanding" of life and relations, could be done both in the school and in the family. (*R. W. Dale, LL.D.*) *The value of mental cultivation*:—Even in the sense of mere mental cultivation this is true. A well-informed, well-stored mind is an acquirement greatly superior in real excellence to aught that is merely external—to wealth, or to all the outward distinction that wealth can procure. It is a source of more rational and richer enjoyment to the person's self, and a far worthier ground of respectability and honour. There are few objects really more pitiable than an ignorant, senseless rich man—a man whose mind, in its unfurnished poverty and emptiness, presents a perpetual contrast with his outward pomp and plenitude. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The best merchandise*:—Why is the merchandise of wisdom better than the merchandise of silver? 1. Because it is a business you can begin sooner than you can any other. 2. Because it is easier to trade in. It requires less money and less labour to carry it on. 3. Because you can have better partners here than in any other pursuits. 4. Because it yields more profit than any other. 5. Because there is more room for engaging in it than in any other. We are all fitted for it, and invited to engage in it. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. *She is more precious than rubies.*—*The quality of virtue*:—The words wisdom, understanding, and knowledge partly translate the word "virtue." I. THE WONDERFUL EFFECTS VIRTUE PRODUCES ON THE MIND. 1. The effects bear no proportion to our immediate sentiments concerning it. 2. Observe the complete change which it produces upon the human character itself. It gives the human being all the value which he can possess. 3. Notice the power it possesses of communicating immediate happiness to the mind. 4. Virtue reaches beyond the agent himself, and affects all who stand in connection with him. 5. Observe the unexpected and amazing changes which it produces upon the great societies of the earth. It is, in fact, the great principle of national happiness and civilisation. II. THE ARGUMENT SUGGESTED. Look beyond the appearances of the moment, and

study and know your real interest, and your own natural and best connections. Placed among men, virtue operates incessantly for their benefit. She is incessantly employed in improving and comforting us. (*John Mackenzie, D.D.*) *The best of all blessings*:—1. We cannot get all that we desire, but we can get the grace of God. 2. If we could get all the things that we desire, they would not make us happy, but the grace of God will. 3. If we could get them, and they could make us happy, we cannot keep them; but we can keep the grace of God. The grace of God, or the religion of Jesus, is the most valuable thing in the world. Then how earnestly we should seek it. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *The circumstances which enhance the value of virtue*:—Virtue is beautiful and lovely in itself. Her dictates are founded on the nature of things. 1. The more accurate and perspicuous our knowledge of the principle which gives birth to a virtuous act, or on which it is performed, the greater is the value of it. 2. The more generous and pure the motives to our good actions, the greater is the value of them. 3. The more the virtues that we practise are contrary to our natural dispositions, to our constitution, or to our darling propensities, the more resplendent and excellent are they. 4. The value of our virtue is greatly enhanced by the outward obstacles we have to contend with in the exercise of it, or in proportion to the little encouragement we meet with in it. 5. The more considerable the privation we undergo for the sake of virtue, the more various and inevitable the hazards that attend it, the greater is its value. 6. The satisfaction, or the willingness with which a virtue is practised, contributes in like manner very much to heighten its beauty or its worth. 7. Constancy in virtue is also a circumstance which enhances the value of it. 8. The more benign the influence of our virtue is upon the public interest, the greater is its value. (*G. J. Zollikofer.*)

Ver. 16. *Length of days is in her right hand.*—*Godliness a help to longevity*:—So far from being true that good men, women, and children die sooner than others, the reverse is actually the case. As wickedness acts as a shortener of life, so does a regard for God's wholesome laws help to lengthen it. It is an unnatural thing for one to desire to die before he has finished his work on earth. It cannot be wrong in us to love life, when God promises it to His children as a special blessing. It is easy to discover why religion is conducive to length of days. Obedient children will be most likely to avoid the vices and crimes which shorten life. The love of life is not peculiar to man as a fallen being. Why do we desire that "length of days" should be our portion? I. BECAUSE LIFE IS PLEASANT, AND THE WORLD, IN SPIRE OF SEASONS OF CLOUDS AND STORMS, IS A BEAUTIFUL ONE. Illustrate by the summer landscape. We love life for its many comforts and enjoyments. Who can estimate the pleasures of the family circle, the genial intercourse of friends, the cultivation of refinement and taste, the peculiar satisfaction which attends literary labours, the accumulation of property as a provision against the season of old age, and that we bear our part in works of beneficence and charity? II. BECAUSE IT IS A SEASON OF USEFULNESS. III. BECAUSE THROUGH LENGTH OF DAYS ON EARTH, WE MAY BE THE BETTER PREPARED TO MEET GOD. Eternity alone is the real life-time of the soul. A life without a purpose is utterly unworthy of him on whom God has bestowed mental gifts and the gift of immortality. (*John N. Norton.*) *The fruits of wisdom*:—There is a great difference between the Old Testament and the New, with respect to the motives by which religious virtue is severally enforced in them. In the old covenant there was an established connection between obedience and outward prosperity. The New Testament differeth from this very widely, both in its general declarations and the instances of fact which its history containeth. Our Lord assured His disciples that they must expect tribulation. Length of days, riches, and honours, instead of being promised as the rewards of Christianity, in some cases, must be renounced by all the servants and disciples of Jesus Christ. It may be that we are reminded of two expressions which seem to promise material prosperity (*Matt. vi. 33; 1 Tim. iv. 8*). But in the first our Lord's design is to show the folly of an inordinate carefulness, not about abundance of worldly things, outward splendour, and great wealth, but the necessities of life, what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be clothed. The promise therefore must be understood to extend no farther than to answer the intention of superseding our thoughtfulness about these needful things. As to the other text, it seemeth to mean that in the practice of true religion we may hope that, ordinarily, God's gracious care will be employed for our support and preservation. If we observe the ordinary methods of Divine

providence, and the general course and state of things, with their connection and dependence in this world, we shall find that, for the most part, the practice of the Christian virtues hath a tendency even to our outward advantage, and to promote our present interest, rather than the contrary. The observation holdeth more universally with respect to communities, some of which have risen from very small beginnings to great and powerful nations, by industry, frugality, the exact distribution of justice, fidelity, and other virtues; on the other hand, the history of all ages sheweth that the most opulent and flourishing kingdoms have been precipitated into ruin by avarice, oppression, luxury, and injustice. I. WISDOM'S GIFT IS LENGTH OF DAYS. Life importeth the capacity for enjoyments, and is the foundation of them all. Length of days has the preference of riches and honour, but not of an approving conscience. That a religious or virtuous course of life tendeth to prolong our days we may be convinced by experience. Temperance, meekness, and patience contribute to long life. Benevolence and the social virtues tend to secure life against that foreign violence to which the unjust, the cruel, and the inhumane are obnoxious. II. WISDOM'S GIFT IS RICHES. There are abuses of wealth. But it may lawfully be sought after as the means of living easy, and enjoying the comforts of this world with moderation. Nature teacheth, and religion doth not forbid it, that we should endeavour to render our condition in this world tolerable. And wealth should also be valued as the means and ability of doing good in a religious and moral sense. Men ordinarily acquire riches by their parsimony, their industry and their credit, and to all these the moral virtues comprehended in wisdom are eminently serviceable. The natural effect of temperance, chastity, humility is to retrench a great many exorbitancies. And diligence is specially commended in religion. Mutual confidence is of great advantage for the getting of riches, and religious character is the sure ground of confidence. III. WISDOM'S GIFT IS HONOUR—that esteem, with the outward tokens and expressions of it, which men have in the world. This is a certain effect of wisdom or religious virtue, because virtue itself maketh the very character which is honourable, or the subject of esteem. Men cannot help having in their heart a veneration for the man who, by the whole course of his behaviour, appears to be pious, sober, just, and charitable, let his condition be what it will. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

The discreet behaviour of the Christian respecting his outward welfare:—Well-being in externals, though not the most important part of our happiness, is yet always a part of it, and consequently a care for its conservation and advancement cannot be absolutely wrong. 1. See that all your efforts to promote your outward welfare are innocent. Employ none other than fair and honest means to that end. 2. Never let your efforts so engross and occupy your mind as to allow you neither inclination nor leisure, time nor ability, to care and labour for that which more proximately and directly promotes the perfection of your spirit. 3. Do not assume that your efforts for your outward welfare must necessarily succeed, or that they are absolutely lost if they fail of success. 4. Dignify your efforts by forming just conceptions of the ultimate end of all earthly goods and outward distinctions. 5. Enjoy the fruits of your labour, in proportion as you reap them, and postpone not the legitimate, discreet use and enjoyment of them, till you shall have acquired and accumulated such or such a store of them. Enjoy all the pleasures, the comforts, the conveniences of life, with a cheerful temper and without anxious care for the future. Enjoy them as men, not as children; enjoy them as Christians. (*G. J. Zollikofer.*) *The gain of true religion*:—Sir Henry Mitchell, a distinguished Methodist layman, made an interesting speech at Bradford, in which he referred to the late Sir Isaac Holden, who was a life-long Methodist. He died respected by every one who knew him, and more than a millionaire. Sir Henry went to see Sir Isaac a little while before his death, and said to him, "You owe most to your religion and to Methodism." To which Sir Isaac replied, "Everything." Sir Isaac added that his study of Methodist doctrine and experience had exercised a most wholesome discipline upon his mind, and had contributed very largely—perhaps more than any other influence that had been brought to bear upon his character—to his success in life. *The advantages of religion*:—"Honour" can only be attained by religion and virtue. I. THE TRUE NATURE OF HONOUR. 1. Used to denote worthy and creditable parentage. 2. Or it signifies titles of place and dignity. Veneration is due to some callings and relations of men, though the persons themselves should not be virtuous. 3. The term is sometimes used for the esteem and reputation which a man hath in the world, especially amongst virtuous persons. Such honour is

"power," enabling a man to do things great and worthy; and it is "safety," as it gives a man an interest in the esteem and affection of others. II. RELIGION AND VIRTUE ARE THE ONLY MEANS OF ATTAINING HONOUR. This can be proved—1. By testimony; from Scripture, from the concurrent opinion of wise men in all ages. 2. By reason. There may be a twofold cause of things—moral and natural. A moral cause is that which doth dispose a man to such a condition, upon the account of fitness or desert, and in this sense honour is the reward of virtue. The natural cause of a thing, by its own immediate efficacy, produces the effect; and in this sense likewise virtue is the cause of honour. 3. By experience; that practical knowing which every man may attain by his own observation. Two objections may be urged against what is thus proved—(1) Good men have met with dishonour, as Christ and His disciples did. (2) Vicious men have sometimes been had in honour. External honour may be due to them; internal honour is only given by those who do not know them. (*Bp. John Wilkins.*)

Ver. 17. *Her ways are ways of pleasantness.*—*The walk of faith a way of pleasantness and peace.*—I. WHY IS IT THAT ALL THE WAYS OF WISDOM ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS, AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE? Because they are the appointment of an infinitely tender Father for His covenant children to walk in. The way towards Mount Zion might have been full of bitterness, but even then it would have been best to walk in the way of safety. Heaven has its openings here. The peaceful mind, the heart that rests in the love of God, the conscience sprinkled with the precious blood of atonement, the will that lies passive in the hands of the Father, or would desire to do so: these form some little openings of what shall be—foretastes of what shall be; these are the little beams of the future day of glory, where night shall never come. Moreover it is pleasant to walk in the ways which others have found pleasant. See the testimony of God's saints. And those paths must be pleasant and peaceful in which the Lord Jesus Christ has gone before us. II. THE PATH OR WALK OF FAITH IS IN ITSELF A MOST HAPPY WALK. Faith looketh to Jesus, and as it looks upon Jesus, it walks in a pleasant path, rests upon Him for wisdom; He is our wisdom. It is not only wisdom which we look to, but it is the wisdom of tender sympathy; and this path is, therefore, a most happy, peaceful, blessed path. Faith looks to Christ for a complete, perfect, and glorious righteousness. Faith looks to Christ for sanctification. Faith looks upon Christ in the way of glorification. It requires wisdom to discern the paths of wisdom. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The ways of true religious wisdom are ways of pleasantness.*—I. ENUMERATE SOME LEADING INSTANCES OF THIS GENERAL TRUTH. 1. It is pleasant to exchange a constant stream of worldly and vain thoughts, for the contemplation of God and heavenly things. 2. It is pleasant to exchange an obstinate stupidity or self-confidence for a penitential sense of sin, accompanied with a hope of forgiveness, founded on the sacrifice of Christ. 3. It is pleasant to exchange self-indulgence for self-denial. 4. It is pleasant to exchange a course of negligence, hypocrisy, and sensuality for a life of activity in the ways of God. 5. It is pleasant to exchange selfishness, injustice, cruelty, pride, and malevolence for an active benevolence towards mankind. 6. It is pleasant to live as a citizen of heaven, as one interested in the affairs of God's eternal kingdom. II. OVIATE SOME CONTRARY OBJECTIONS. 1. There will be a secret demur about this pleasantness, on the ground of feeling no strong propensity towards it. 2. Of opposing the requirements of religion, conviction, humiliation, repentance, &c. 3. Of the influence of carnal relations and acquaintances. 4. Of the conduct of some professors. Let us try ourselves, whether the ways of wisdom are indeed pleasant to us. Have we felt the bitterness of sin, and of a sinful state? Have we felt our distance from this pleasure, and impossibility of getting near it? Have we seen the glory of God, universally? Have we seen the transcendent glory, and tasted the sweetness of the person and love of Jesus Christ? Have we an insatiable thirst after this sweetness? (*J. Love, D.D.*) *The advantages of virtue and piety.*—Two opinions the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust. 1. A vicious life is a life of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages. 2. A religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state. The truth is, that besides the principal work which religion does for us in securing our future well-being in the other world, it is likewise the most effectual means to promote our present, and that not only morally, but by a natural tendency in themselves, which the duties of religion have to procure us riches, health, reputation, credit, and all those things wherein our temporal happiness is thought to consist. 1. Justice and honesty contribute very much towards all the faculties

of the mind. 2. In the continuance and course of a virtuous man's affairs there is little probability of his falling into considerable disappointments or calamities—not only because guarded by the providence of God, but because honesty is in its own nature the freest from danger. 3. The religious and moral man is disposed to procure help, which never enters into the thoughts of a wicked one. Being conscious of upright intentions, he can look towards heaven, and with some assurance recommend his affairs to God's blessing and direction. 4. In all good governments the upright and honest man stands much fairer for preferment, and is much more likely to be employed in all things where fidelity is wanted. 5. The more and longer a virtuous man is known, so much the better is he loved and trusted. 6. Virtue brings peace and content of mind. Virtue befriends us in the life to come. (*Laurence Sterne.*) *The peace and pleasantness of true religion:—*

I. PLEASURE IS THE IDOL OF MAN. All men desire happiness, and all strive, some way or other, to secure it. But fallen man is liable to many and fatal mistakes in the pursuit of it. Is the man of the world really happy? Such men have their pleasures; but they have no true happiness, because their pleasures are neither certain, solid, nor lasting. **II. THE WAYS OF TRUE RELIGION ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS.** It is God's will that man should be happy. The knowledge of God in Christ is the first step towards happiness. It is not only "life eternal," it is present peace and pleasure to "know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent." (*Charles Davy.*) *Ways of pleasantness:—*The man of pleasure utterly mistakes both his object and his pursuit. The only happiness worth seeking is found here; that which will live in all circumstances, and abides the ceaseless changes of this mortal life. "The ways" may be dark and lonely, yet how does the sunshine of reconciliation beam upon their entrance! Every step is lighted from above, and strewed with promises; a step in happiness, a step to heaven. Wisdom's work is its own reward—strictness without bondage. God rules children, not slaves. They work neither from compulsion, nor from hire, but from an ingenious principle of gratitude to their Benefactor, filial delight in their Father. Pleasant, therefore, must be the labour, yea, the sacrifices of love; short the path, cheerful the way, when the heart goes freely with it. (*C. Bridges, M.A.*) *The pleasures of a religious life:—*

I. PREMISE A FEW THINGS FOR EXPLAINING THE TEXT. 1. What is said of the pleasures of religion supposes that persons are inured to the practice of it, and have a virtuous disposition and turn of mind. Every pleasure must have its faculty of perceiving, suited and adapted to it. 2. In interpreting the text we must except extraordinary cases, such as that of violent persecution. 3. The text does not speak of what is always the fact, but of the direct and natural tendency of the thing. The pleasures of religion may be destroyed by dark and gloomy notions of it, or by the influence of a melancholy habit. **II. THE PECULIAR EXCELLENCY OF THE PLEASURES OF RELIGION AND VIRTUE.** They are the highest mankind are capable of; have everything in them that can recommend any pleasures to the pursuit of rational beings, and infinitely the advantage, in many respects, over all other enjoyments whatsoever. Let us show the difference between the several pleasures to which mankind are addicted, and prove that their particular sentiments, prejudices, affections, and habits do not destroy, or in reality at all lessen, this necessary difference; and that the superiority on all accounts, whether it be in respect of purity, solidity, duration, and every other circumstance that can help to furnish out the most complete satisfaction, is on the side of the pleasures of the virtuous man. 1. The pleasures of virtue suppose all those unruly passions to be subdued, or at least controlled and moderated, which are the cause of the greatest disorders and miseries in human life. 2. The pleasures of virtue will bear the strictest review, and improve upon reflection. 3. The pleasures of religion depend entirely on ourselves, and not on those numberless accidents which may either prevent, or blast, or entirely destroy all outward pleasures. 4. The pleasures of religion can never be pursued to an excess: never beyond the most deliberate dictates of reason; to bring a just reproach on ourselves, or to the injury of others. 5. Religious pleasures are our best, our only support, under the disappointments and calamities of life. 6. The pleasures of religion are of all others the most durable. (*James Foster.*) *Pleasantness and peace:—*True piety has in it the greatest true pleasure. The ways in which she has directed us to walk are such as we shall find abundance of delight and satisfaction in. All the enjoyments and entertainments of sense are not comparable to the pleasure which gracious souls have in communion with God and doing good. That which is the only right way to bring us to our journey's end we must walk in, fair or foul,

pleasant or unpleasant; but the way of religion, as it is the right way, so it is a pleasant way: it is smooth and clean, and strewed with roses. There is not only peace in the end, but peace in the way; not only in the way of religion in general, but in the particular paths of that way, in all her paths, all the several acts, instances, and duties of it. One does not embitter what the other sweetens, as it is with the allays of this world. (*Matthew Henry*.) *A pleasant road to travel*:—I. THIS IS JOY ENDURING. II. IT INTRODUCES TO GOOD SOCIETY. III. ITS CHEERFUL PROSPECT. IV. ITS JOYFUL TERMINATION. (*J. W. Bray*.) *The temporal advantages of a religious life*:—I. A JUST CONCEPTION OF THE NATURE AND SITUATION OF MAN. With a body compounded from the earth, man became a living soul. Between those very different substances, matter and spirit, the union is most perfect. The situation of man agrees with his nature. By his intellectual powers he asserts his relation to the world of mind and spirit; but his material part connects him with a world which, abounding with evils, manifestly appears to be the place of preparation for riper and ascending existence. With this nature, and in this situation, from whence can man derive the strongest promise of successful toil? A man may follow happiness by the path of power; by the pursuit of wealth; by becoming a votary of pleasure. But the ways of unrighteousness never can be the ways of pleasantness, nor its paths peace. II. OF RELIGION, AS SHE STANDS OPPOSED TO HER RIVALS, THE MOST OBVIOUS AND DISCRIMINATING ADVANTAGES ARE THESE. 1. Her impartiality and easiness of access. 2. The comfort and certainty which attend her in possession. 3. The beneficial consequences of the pursuit which she directs. 4. The supreme beauty and importance of the objects to which she looks. (*C. Symmons, B.D.*) *Religion and its value*:—What is the generally accepted sense in which the word "religion" is used in our own times? The same persons are found to use the term in somewhat different senses. It may denote the creed or technical beliefs of different people, or the rites and ceremonies of each religious section of humanity. But religious doctrines and rites both derive their origin from the sentiment of religion which is common to all the religions of the world. Both belief and practice are dependent on what we may call a sentiment of God, a consciousness that there is a God, a desire to believe correctly about Him, and to please Him by certain actions. The sentiment is the same under whatever forms the religious doctrine and practice may show themselves. Religion is independent of the forms it may assume. Religion is radically a consciousness of God, involving various thoughts and feelings concerning Him, but always more or less coupled with a sense of personal obligation to Him. Religions are the various modes in which that consciousness is expressed, both as to the intellectual notions concerning God held as doctrines, and the rites, ceremonies, and practices regarded as obligatory, or as deemed pleasing to God. I. RELIGION DOES NOT CONSIST IN MERE BELIEFS ABOUT GOD, OR IN THE OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS RITES. Not that these are of no importance, only that they must not be put as substitutes for true religion. Since Comte's day there has been a tendency to confound religion with morality. The two things are distinct, though inseparable. II. RELIGION IS NOT ALWAYS ASSOCIATED WITH TRUE BELIEFS. The intellectual beliefs of a man's religion can only be approximations to the truth more or less remote; rites and ceremonies are obligatory so far as we find them serviceable to our own spiritual culture, and beneficial to the community as acts of social worship. The value of religion consists in its affording satisfaction to the most imperative demands of our nature; in its power to soothe and console the mind under bitterest griefs; and in the bright hopes which it inspires for the life to come. The refinement and elevation of character among the vast majority of our race have been mainly owing to the sanctions created or intensified by religious emotion. Not one of human sorrows can be so adequately, so bounteously compensated for as by religion. Stoicism, the privilege only of the few, can only be enjoyed by turning the heart to stone. Epicurism, the resource of spiritual dipsomaniacs, is a remedy more degrading than suicide. Philanthropic enthusiasm, noble in itself, and demanded from us by religion, will only act as an anodyne, leaving the heart, in the intervals of its influence, face to face with its inconsolable misery. But religion reconciles us to all forms and degrees of sorrow. It turns every event that seems hostile into the act of a Faithful Friend. Religion reigns over the entire man—not content with the outward polish of the manners, but purifying at their source the principles and motives of all right conduct. (*C. Voysey, M.A.*) *The happiness of true religion*:—As man is endowed with reason and a sense of moral obligation, he is capable of being affected by rational motives, and therefore religion is congenial to his nature.

That true religion produces perfect happiness may be proved—1. From the eternal distinction which subsists between virtue and vice. In man there is a moral sense which approves or disapproves antecedently to the operation of reason. 2. From the internal and exquisite satisfaction which obedience to religious precepts affords, and the excruciating misery which a violation of them always produces in the human breast. 3. The observation in the text is displayed with the greatest force at the hour of death. Religion, immortal, is the never-failing friend of man. 4. The paths of wisdom lead to happiness, while a vicious course of life terminates in infamy and ruin. (*A. Stirling, LL.D.*) *The gifts of Wisdom*:—Both the hands of Wisdom are filled with blessings for those who come to serve her. Like the God of Wisdom she can never give enough to her devotees and worshippers. She has nothing but reward for those who love her counsels and obey her behests. As for her ways, they are like the streets of the New Jerusalem, paved with gold; and as for her paths, they are full of peace without disturbance, sacredly calm as the very security of heaven. Not only does Wisdom give with the hand—she grows, she abounds in fruitfulness, she surprises all her children with new products. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *On the happiness of a virtuous career*:—Virtue is the image of God in the soul, and the noblest thing in the creation; and therefore it must be the principal ground of true happiness. 1. By practising virtue we gratify the highest powers of our natures. 2. Virtue, in the very idea of it implies health and order of mind. 3. By practising virtue we gain more of the united pleasures, arising from the gratification of all our powers, than we can in any other way. The course most conducive to happiness must be that which is most agreeable to our whole nature. 4. Much of the pleasure of vice itself depends on some species or other of virtue combined with it. 5. Virtue leaves us in possession of all the common enjoyments of life, and it even improves and refines them. This effect it produces by restraining us to regularity and moderation in the gratification of our desires. 6. Virtue has peculiar joys such as nothing else can give—such as the love of the Deity, peace of conscience, a sense of God's favour, the hope of future reward. Now consider some peculiar qualities of this happiness. (1) It is more permanent than any other happiness; (2) more independent; (3) more pure and refined; (4) it continues with a man even in affliction. Inferences: 1. How wrong is it to conceive of religious virtue as an enemy to pleasure. 2. What strong evidence we have for the moral government of the Deity. 3. What reasons we have for seeking virtue above all things. (*R. Price, D.D.*) *Pleasure and peace the certain consequences of virtue*:—I. THE PLEASURES OF RELIGION ARE MORE NOBLE, DELIGHTFUL, AND LASTING THAN THE PLEASURES OF SIN. More noble, as the soul, that is chiefly conversant with them, far excels the body; and as the objects from whence they are derived are superior to those that gratify our senses. The pleasures of virtue are more delightful than the pleasures of sin, as they are pure and without alloy. And the remembrance of having done our duty is a continual feast. II. THE PRACTICE OF RELIGION KEEPS US IN PERPETUAL PEACE AND SAFETY. Religion preserves a settled tranquillity in the mind, and prevents disquieting fears and the tumults of unruly passions. It engages the kindness of Providence, and gains the good-will of men. It heightens every enjoyment, and effectually comforts in every trial. (*T. Newlin, M.A.*) *The happiness of religion*:—True religion yields its joys only to the heart that is unreservedly surrendered to its sway. While the heart continues to be parted between God and the world, it cannot be to the disparagement of religion that the happiness promised by it to its votaries is not enjoyed. In true religion itself, in the ways and paths, the more open and the more private walks of heavenly wisdom, there is true blessedness. What is there in true religion to engender gloom? It is light; and it is the property and office of light, not to gather mists, but to dispel them. It turns the shades of night into the morning. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The pleasantness of religion*:—Most proverbial expressions will admit of some particular exceptions, and the plain meaning of this one is, that it is the natural tendency of religion to make men peaceful and happy. I. THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF RELIGION HATH A MIGHTY EFFECT TO REMOVE THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF DISQUIETUDE. If the mind be easy and cheerful, it is not of essential consequence what our outward circumstances may be. 1. Religion removes doubt and uncertainty. The knowledge and experience of religion sets a man in a good measure free from anxieties, allays the ferment in his breast, and restores an agreeable composure to the mind. How pleasant is the assent which the mind gives to the truth, when it has the ready concurrence of the will, and the firm support of personal experience! 2. Religion removes the sense of guilt. Men attempt by

various ways to relieve themselves of uneasy thoughts, but religion alone frees from guilt and its fears. 3. Religion removes the restlessness and turbulency of unsanctified passions. It strikes at the root of our corruptions, and forbids them to rule and tyrannise in the heart. II. THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE OF RELIGION ARE ATTENDED WITH POSITIVE JOYS AND PLEASURES. 1. The discoveries of religion afford the highest entertainment to the understanding. 2. Its hopes and comforts possess the heart. What a blessing is peace of conscience! And the sense of God's favour; and a firm faith in Divine Providence; and communion with God; and the hope of eternal life! There is a solid satisfaction in the temper and conduct religion recommends; in the duties of devotion and worship. (*S. Stennett, D.D.*) *Pleasure a relative thing*:—That pleasure is man's chiefest good (because it is the perception of good that is properly pleasure) is an assertion most certainly true, though under the common acceptance of it, not only false, but odious; for, according to this, pleasure and sensuality pass for terms equivalent. Pleasure in general is the apprehension of a suitable object, suitably applied to a rightly disposed faculty, and so must be conversant both with the faculties of the body and of the soul respectively, as being the result of the fruitions belonging to both. It is too often assumed that religion is an enemy to all pleasures—it bereaves them of all the sweets of converse, dooms them to an absurd and perpetual melancholy, designing to make the world nothing else but a great monastery; with which notion of religion, nature and reason seem to have great cause to be dissatisfied. He who would persuade men to religion, both with art and efficacy, must found the persuasion of it upon this, that it interferes not with any rational pleasure, that it bids nobody quit the enjoyment of any one thing that his reason can prove to him ought to be enjoyed. An argument from experience may be taken to urge that it must be the greatest trouble in the world for a man to shake off himself and to defy his nature, by a perpetual thwarting of his innate appetites and desires. But this religion requires. I. PLEASURE IS, IN THE NATURE OF IT, A RELATIVE THING. So it imports a peculiar relation and correspondence to the state and condition of the person to whom it is a pleasure. II. THE ESTATE OF ALL MEN BY NATURE BECOMES CHANGED. It is more or less different from that estate into which the same persons do, or may, pass by the exercise of that which the philosophers call virtue, and into which men are much more effectually and sublimely translated by that which we call grace; that is, by the supernatural overpowering operation of God's Spirit. A man, while he resigns himself up to the brutish guidance of sense and appetite, has no relish at all for the spiritual, refined delights of a soul clarified by grace and virtue. The Athenians laughed the physiognomist to scorn who, pretending to read men's minds in their foreheads, described Socrates as a crabbed, lustful, proud, ill-natured person; they knowing how directly contrary he was to that dirty character. But Socrates bade them forbear laughing at the man; for that he had given them a most exact account of his nature; but what they saw in him so contrary at the present was from the conquest that he had got over his natural disposition by philosophy. True pleasure is that of the mind, which is an image, not only of God's spirituality, but also of His infinity. Religion belongs to it in reference—1. To speculation, as it sustains the name of understanding. 2. To practice, as it sustains the name of conscience. Religious pleasure never satiates or wearies; it is in nobody's power, but only in his that hath it. So that he who hath the propriety may be also sure of the perpetuity. The man never outlives it, because he cannot outlive himself. Then it follows that to exhort men to be religious is only in other words to exhort them to take their pleasure—a pleasure made for the soul, and the soul for it—suitable to its spirituality, and equal to all its capacities. (*R. South, D.D.*) *Godliness is pleasant and delightful*:—The excellency of godliness and religion seen—I. FROM ITS PLEASURE AND DELIGHT. 1. In the work of grace and regeneration wrought in the heart. 2. Even grace, the more it is improved, carries a delight and pleasurable-ness in it. 3. There is a great pleasingness in all the duties and exercises of religion. In prayer, reading the Scriptures, communion of the saints, sacraments, Sabbaths, &c. Religion does indeed cause some kinds of grief and sorrow, such as godly sorrow for sin. And when we say that the ways of spiritual wisdom and grace are ways of pleasantness we do not mean it of the mad mirth of the world, which consists in nothing but vanity and folly, and luxuriancy of spirit. II. FROM ITS TRANQUILLITY AND QUIET. Religion is the business of peace, and carries peace along with it. 1. With God, the peace of reconciliation. 2. With ourselves, the peace of assurance. 3. With one another, the peace of communion. The more

godliness, then, the more pleasure in godliness. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Present advantages of piety*:—These words are designed to counteract a prejudice which prevails, that religion is connected with melancholy, and calls upon us to bid adieu to all the innocent and natural enjoyments of life. The case of those who suffer persecution for the sake of religion should be excluded from the present view, which relates to the ordinary state and circumstances of piety in this world. And in order to contemplate the tendency of any principle we must view it as operating in its mature, and vigorous, and perfect state. I. THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THOSE OBJECTS WHICH ARE SUPPOSED TO BE MOST CONTRIBUTORY TO THE PRESENT HAPPINESS OF MANKIND. 1. The prolongation of life. Piety inspires that moderation in all things which is equally favourable to the faculties of the body and the mind. It exerts a tranquillising influence on all our emotions. Involved in the prolongation of life is the preservation of health. The good man regards health as a talent entrusted to him. 2. The possession of reputation. Piety promotes esteem: a good man commonly lives down at last the enmity which his virtues had at first excited. 3. The acquisition of property. To the attainment of moderate wealth piety is favourable. II. THE PRESENT EFFECTS OF RELIGION WHICH BELONG TO THE STATE OF THE MIND. 1. Belief in the good Governor of all things. 2. Harmony with this Best of Beings. 3. Free access to this Almighty Friend. 4. The most essential elements of piety are all favourable to happiness. These may be stated as adoration and benevolence. (*R. Hall.*) *The pleasantness of religion*:—I. RELIGION PROMOTES HAPPINESS BY REMOVING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES OF MAN'S UNHAPPINESS. Many people account for the unhappiness of their mind by the peculiar circumstances in which they are placed. Differences in circumstances may, to a certain extent, influence our minds as well as our bodies; but still not so much depends on such circumstances as is generally imagined. 1. One cause of unhappiness is guilt. 2. Another is fear. 3. The influence of unholy tempers. 4. Insatiable thirst after creature enjoyments. II. RELIGION PRODUCES HAPPINESS BY OPENING UP NEW SOURCES OF COMFORT AND ENJOYMENT IN THE MIND OF MAN. The world, and the good things of the world, are enjoyed in a new way. There is the testimony of a good conscience; an assurance of Divine favour; the Spirit of adoption; the enjoyment of communion with God in His ordinances; a persuasion of the truth of God's promises; and a solid, well-grounded hope. It is true that some professors of religion are not happy under the influence of their opinions and views. Some profess religion who do not enjoy the life and power of it. Some are double-minded, and try to serve two masters. Some live, as it were, under the law. Some are constitutionally inclined to discouragement and despondency, labouring under the disadvantages of a debilitated and nervous state of body. In conclusion, religion comes well recommended to you. There are two heavens offered you, one here and one in glory. (*J. Entwisle.*) *The pleasures of religion*:—It is a maxim admitted by all the world, that "Every one is drawn by pleasure." It is the misery of our fallen nature that we are not drawn so much by the best pleasures as by the worst; the pleasures we generally prefer end in pain; the pleasures we commonly neglect are such as would make us happy for ever. These are the pleasures of religion, the "ways of wisdom." What are the pleasures of religion? I. THE POSSESSION OF CHRISTIAN GRACES. The great thing which distinguishes a Christian is "having the Spirit" (Rom. viii. 9). The Spirit is the author of a new and Divine life in the soul of the believer. Every grace is implanted in his soul, the exercise of which is as natural and pleasant to the new nature as the due exercise of our senses is to the natural man. These graces are knowledge, faith, repentance, hope, love. II. THE ENJOYMENT OF CHRISTIAN PRIVILEGES. Such are—1. Peace with God through faith in the blood of Christ. 2. Sacred joy in the redemption wrought for him. 3. Adoption into the family of God. III. THE PERFORMANCE OF CHRISTIAN DUTIES. Such as prayer, praise, reading and hearing the Word, the Lord's day. As all these are good and pleasant in themselves, so they appear to greater advantage if compared with the pleasures of the world. They are certainly far more solid and satisfying, far more rational and noble, and, above all, far more durable. There is far more pleasure in religion now than there is in sin, and we are sure that it will end better. (*G. Burder.*) *The happiness attendant on the paths of religion*:—This passage breathes the voice of the most cheering encouragement. I. EVINCE THE TRUTH OF THIS DECLARATION. The religious man is delivered by religion from those causes of solicitude, terror, and affliction which are the principal sources of the miseries of mankind; the experiences, helps, and consolations

tions to which, in proportion as men are not religious, they are strangers. 1. The most grievous of all distresses is the sense of unpardoned guilt. From this the religious man is set free. He looks up to God, through Christ, as to a reconciled Father. The burden is removed from his soul, and he goeth on his way rejoicing. Every token of grateful obedience which he is enabled to render overspreads his heart with gladness. As he advances in religion he advances in happiness. 2. Another distress arises from the immoderate fear of falling away from God under future temptations. The religious man fears for himself. But his fear is not an overwhelming terror. It is a fear which excludes all dependence on his own strength. It is a fear which produces humility, caution, vigilance, meditation, and prayer. But it is not a fear which brings anguish; it is not a fear which urges to despondence. 3. The religious man is delivered from corroding anxieties as to the events which may befall him during the residue of his life. 4. He is also delivered from the fear of the last enemy, Death. 5. There yet remain various circumstances which attend the religious man in the ordinary course of his life, and contribute no small accessions to the daily amount of his happiness. By the integrity and kindness of his conduct he is often placed beyond the reach of those who may be desirous of injuring him. His domestic life is a source of happiness. His friends will be found tender and faithful. The general temper of his mind is cheerful serenity. From the common bounties of providence he derives higher satisfaction than other men. II. APPLY THE INSTRUCTION WHICH MAY BE DRAWN FROM THE TEXT. 1. Address those who are decidedly wicked. 2. Those who are wavering between the paths of religion and the paths of guilt. 3. Those who are religious. (*Thomas Gisborne, M.A.*) *Religion a comfortable way of life*:—Here is another motive to get wisdom. Wouldst thou go in pleasant ways, and live in peace and quietness? All wisdom's ways are such. The man who gets wisdom gets true happiness and delight. When merchants go by sea, or passengers by land, they are glad when they find fair way and a quiet passage. The words of this text are fitly knit to the former, for long life, riches, and honour are not sufficient to make a man happy. He may meet with many occasions of sorrow, and of war, and trouble, which may make his life very uncomfortable. Here, therefore, Solomon adds to the former blessings pleasure and peace, to show that nothing is wanting to the wise man. He had commended wisdom before *ex parte termini*, from happiness to the end: now he commends it *ex parte medii*, from the comfort of the way. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *The pleasures of real religion*:—I. THE WAY OF RELIGION IS THE WAY OF WISDOM. They that are truly religious are wise, and the following of religion is the wisest course in the world. 1. The way of religion is the way of truth. 2. The way of God's commandments. 3. The way of faith, not of sense. 4. The way of holiness. 5. The way of irreconcilable opposition to the devil, the world, and the flesh. 6. The way of spiritual worship. 7. The straight and narrow way. 8. The way of universal obedience. 9. The good old way. This way is the way of wisdom, because—1. God has directed the children of men into this way. 2. The Lord Jesus leads His people in this way. 3. The Spirit determines men to enter and walk in this way. 4. Jesus Himself took this way. 5. It is the way most agreeable to right reason. 6. It is the only way to happiness, here or hereafter. II. THE WAYS OF RELIGION ARE THE MOST PLEASANT AND PEACEFUL WAYS. To whom are the ways of religion pleasant? 1. To those who have the art of walking in them. 2. To those who habituate themselves to close walking with God. Consider—3. The testimony of the saints who, in all ages, have given this for their verdict of the ways of God. 4. That pleasure, innocency and holiness arrive always together at their height. 5. That religion, so far as it does prevail, frees us from the cause of our woe. 6. That God directs and assists His servants by His Spirit. 7. That the Lord binds upon His saints the walking in His ways with the softest and sweetest ties imaginable, the answering of which must needs create a pleasure in the doing thereof. 8. There is a sweetness interwoven with the Christian walk. 9. There is a transcendent pleasure at the end of the way. Religion, then, brings a calm into the soul which no other thing can do. It gives a rest and satisfaction that can nowhere else be found. It breaks the reigning power of lusts and corruptions, which cause the soul much uneasiness. It brings the soul to the accomplishment of its desires. It brings into a state of resignation to the will of God. The pleasures of religion are of such an elevated nature that all others seem but low and grovelling in comparison of them; such as the victory over lusts and corruptions; the approbation of one's own conscience; the assurance of God's acceptance; the joy of doing good to others; communion with God; assurance of

the Lord's love and eternal salvation. Such pleasures are refined and pure; they satisfy without loathing or disgust; they are ready, and near at hand; and lasting. Religion helps a man to draw the greatest possible pleasure from created things.

III. PEACE ALSO IS TO BE ENJOYED IN THE WAY OF RELIGION. A sevenfold peace. 1. With God. 2. Of conscience. 3. Of heart by the soul's rest in God. 4. Of mind. 5. With the creatures of God. 6. As prosperity. 7. Peace eternal. What peace can any one have in the way of sin? What peace is there to a man who is a stranger to the Mediator of peace? What peace so long as stinging guilt remains in the conscience, unsatisfied desires in the heart, and lusts reigning within? (T. Boston, D.D.)

The beauty of holiness:—He who would effectually plead the cause of piety and religion must not only recommend the principles of it to the understanding, as most true and certain, but the practice of it to the will and affections, as desirable and delightful. Nothing would tend more to the advancement of true godliness than if we could clearly demonstrate that it hath not only the advantage above sin and vice in respect of future and eternal joys, but in respect of present pleasure and satisfaction. What is this wisdom which is thus profitable, thus pleasant? Is it a subtle management of our own concerns? Nay, it is nothing else but true religion, solid piety and holiness. I. ALL PLEASURE ARISETH FROM AN ATTEMPTED SUITABLENESS AND HARMONY THERE IS BETWEEN THE FACULTY AND THE OBJECT. Where there is any disagreement, either in contrariety or in excess, the result is not pleasure but torment. 1. The pleasures which religion brings are not such as do immediately affect the body, the drossy and earthy part of man. 2. Religion, as it doth allow, so it adds a sweetness and relish to the lawful comforts of this present life. Experience proves that sobriety and temperance bring more true pleasure than excess and riot. A constant fear of God, and a conscientious obedience to Him, give a seasoning to all our earthly enjoyments. A good conscience is a continual feast. 3. The chief joys which religion gives are internal and mental. And these are incomparably beyond the delights of sense.

II. THIS PURE AND SPIRITUAL PLEASURE ARISETH IN THE MIND FROM THREE THINGS. 1. A congruity and suitableness in holy and religious actions to the rules and principles of right reason. There are three general principles of natural religion. (1) That God is loved and feared above all, and the revelations of His will to be credited and obeyed. (2) That we ought to govern ourselves with all temperance and sobriety, in the use of the comforts of this life. (3) That we ought to demean ourselves towards others with the exactest justice and equity. Where our actions do correspond with these principles of reason, there must arise an intellectual joy and complacency. 2. The comfortable reflections of our own consciences upon holy and religious actions. Self-reflection is sweet and comfortable to a true Christian. 3. The hope and expectation of the eternal reward of our obedience. 4. That must be most pleasant which calms all our perturbations and disturbances, and fits us to enjoy both God and ourselves in a sedate composure. III. COMMON OBSERVATION AND EXPERIENCE WILL BE CITED TO DISPROVE ALL THESE SPECULATIONS CONCERNING THE PLEASURE OF RELIGION. It is pleaded that, in actual fact, many of the votaries of religion are miserable and melancholy. In answer we say—1. The joys of religion are not loud and tumultuous, but grave, solid, and serious. "True joy is a severe thing." It lies deep and recondite, in the centre of the soul, and fills it with calm thoughts, sedate affections, and uniform peace and tranquillity. 2. If, at any time, the religious man be really sad and dejected, this is not to be imputed to religion, but to the want of it, either in himself or others. 3. Even the tears and sorrows of a true, pious Christian have a more solid joy in them than all the noise and extravagant jollity of wicked men. There is a sweetness even in mourning, when it is filial and ingenuous. Tears are a solace, and grief itself an entertainment.

IV. WHAT THEN IS TO BE SAID OF THE MORTIFICATIONS AND SELF-DENIALS WHICH RELIGION REQUIRES?—ARE NOT THESE UNPLEASANT? Is there nothing in these things that is difficult to be done, and grievous to be borne? 1. It is true that there are many things in religion which are difficult and laborious, but this does not argue them to be unpleasant and grievous. The whole Christian life is warfare; in it there must be strain and discipline. 2. We must keep in mind that there is a twofold nature in every Christian—his corrupt and his Divine nature. Two contrary parties are struggling within him. The rigorous duties of religion are only so to the corrupt and sinful inclinations; they are a joy and pleasure to the renewed and sanctified nature. 3. The severities of religion are far more difficult and distasteful at our first entrance upon a holy life than they will be when

we are confirmed and habituated in it. 4. The severities of religion are no more nor greater than what we are content to undergo in things of another nature. The sinner meets with far more trouble in the ways of sin than the most strict and holy Christian can do in the ways of obedience. The complaints against the rigours of religion proceed only from mistakes and prejudices. (*Bp. E. Hopkins.*)

The ways of wisdom :—If we consider wisdom only as an object of speculation, the mind hath satisfaction in meditating upon it. The greatest delight ariseth from serious devout meditation on God. Pleasure springeth from different occasions. We ought to use our reason in order to choose those pleasures which, all things considered, are the best and fittest for us. In order to choose we should consider—1. The testimony of those who have made trial of wisdom's ways, and agree in assuring us that they are ways of pleasantness and peace. 2. The experience of those who have but the lowest measure of this wisdom; these can show the painfulness of the ways of sin and folly. 3. The fact that wisdom's ways lead to the enjoyment of the Divine favour, and our walking in them is the only foundation upon which we can have confidence toward God. 4. The pleasures which accompany sincere religion; that is, which arise from the testimony of an approving conscience. Compare the pleasures of religion with the pleasures of sense. (1) The gratifications of sense are common with us to the brutal kinds. (2) The pleasures of this world are but precarious; we can have no sure hold on them. (3) Those only can be accounted the greatest, the noblest, and in all respects the most valuable comforts, which support and relieve the mind in its greatest need. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

The pleasantness of religion :—By "wisdom" is understood an habitual skill or faculty of judging aright about matters of practice. "Ways" and "paths" in Scripture dialect are the courses and manners of action. By "pleasantness" may be meant the joy and delight accompanying a course of such actions, and by "peace" the content and satisfaction which ensue from it. A course of life directed by wisdom and good judgment is delightful in the practice, and brings content after it. 1. Wisdom is of itself delectable and satisfactory, as it implies a revelation of truth and a detection of error to us; as it satisfies our best desires, by enriching our minds with excellent and useful knowledge, directed to the noblest objects, and serviceable to the highest ends. 2. Wisdom disposes us to acquire and to enjoy all the good and happiness we are capable of. 3. Wisdom frees us from the company of anxious doubt in our actions, and the consequence of bitter repentance. 4. Wisdom begets in us a hope of success in our actions. 5. Wisdom prevents discouragement from the possibility of ill-success, and makes disappointment tolerable. 6. Wisdom makes all the troubles, griefs, and pains incident to life easy and supportable, by rightly valuing the importance and moderating the influence of them. 7. Wisdom always has a good conscience attending it. 8. Wisdom confers on its possessor a facility, expert readiness, and dexterity in action which is a very pleasant and commodious quality. 9. Wisdom disposes us with judgment to distinguish, and with pleasure to relish, wholesome things. 10. Wisdom acquaints us with ourselves, our own temper and constitution, our propensities and passions, our habitudes and capacities. 11. Wisdom procures and preserves a constant favour and fair respect of men, purchases a good name, and upholds reputation. 12. Wisdom instructs us to examine, compare, and rightly to value the objects that court our affections and challenge our care, merely regulating our passions and moderating our endeavours. 13. Wisdom preserves order, the parent of peace; and prevents confusion, the mother of iniquity, strife, and disquiet. 14. Wisdom discovers our relations, duties, and concerns with respect to men, as well as the natural grounds of them. 15. It acquaints us with the nature and reason of true religion, affording the most convincing arguments to persuade us to the practice of it. 16. Wisdom attracts the favour of God, purchases for us a glorious reward, and secures to us a perpetual felicity. All these things are sources of satisfaction and delight. (*Isaac Barrow, D.D.*)

Pleasantness of religion :—This is not only the excellence, but the peculiar excellence, of religion. The ways of folly and vice, all things considered, are not ways of pleasantness. Goodness is proposed as the duty, and pleasure as the reward—a reward which the world and Satan are not able to give. I. THE WAYS OF RELIGION ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS. 1. There is a pleasure in the duties immediately relating to God; such as love, faith, reliance, resignation, hope, prayer, and thanksgiving. These are all apparently cheerful duties, and when duly performed, must be attended with the highest satisfaction. 2. There is a pleasure in those occupations in which a virtuous and religious man will be frequently employed. 3. There is a pleasure in

that behaviour towards others, and that manner of prosecuting our worldly affairs, which ever accompany a religious disposition. 4. There is a pleasure in performing our duty to ourselves, as it relates to the body and to the passions. II. THE WAYS OF SIN ARE NOT WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS. 1. No man can be happy who acts against his conscience. 2. Those who feel no remorse of conscience may have shaken off some fears, but then they have lost the greatest comfort of life, which is hope. 3. Every action contrary to reason and religion is, if not always, yet certainly for the most part, hurtful even in this life. III. THE OBJECTIONS WHICH WICKED MEN MAKE TO THESE PROPOSITIONS. 1. They say they do find pleasantness in their self-gratifications. 2. Sinners object that good men, who affirm from their own experience that there is pleasure in righteousness, are grave dissemblers, who conceal the real state of their minds: that really they sacrifice their present ease and satisfaction. 3. Sinners say that the pleasures of a pious mind, if there be such, arise from a strong fancy, from fanaticism and enthusiasm. 4. Sinners say experience shows these boasted pleasures of religion not to be very common amongst Christians. 5. Sinners may object that some duties of Christianity are harsh and disagreeable, as repentance, self-denial, and mortifications, and that therefore the ways of religion cannot be ways of pleasantness. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *Life within life*:—Are we to understand, then, that those who are wise and of an understanding heart are saved from all the disappointment and trouble of earthly pilgrimage? The facts of life instantly contradict such a view. But there is life within life. The true life throbs beneath all the appearances which are possible to the observer, and even below the experiences which often trouble the believer himself. The most illustrious instance of all completely disproves the suggestion that true wisdom exempts from earthly trial, for the Son of God Himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as for His poverty, it is enough to know that as the Son of Man He had not where to lay His head. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*) *The pleasantness of wisdom's ways*:—Here the motive presented is that of the present and immediate happiness in this world which is uniformly to be found in God's service. I. EXPLAIN THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. Wisdom is the fear of the Lord, doing the commandments of God, or in other words, religion. It is not merely said that religious ways lead to pleasantness; they are the ways of pleasantness in the abstract. Religion does not merely make people happy, religion is happiness. There is no way in which true wisdom requires us to walk which is not a way of peace; not only is there peace in the end, there is peace by the way. II. CONFIRM THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. Remember the character of God. He wills the happiness of His servants now, and not merely by and by (1 Tim. iv. 8). Godliness has the "promise of the life that now is." III. ACCOUNT FOR THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. Religion in every one of its exercises is happiness. 1. Take it in its most general character—as consisting in the love of God and our neighbour. The atmosphere of love is the atmosphere of heaven. There is more happiness in loving than in being loved. 2. Every one of the "fruits of the Spirit" is an ingredient of happiness—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance. 3. Consider the happiness naturally attendant on the Christian's occupation, the pursuit of everlasting glory. 4. The happiness of a good conscience, and so the consciousness of peace with God. (*F. F. Trench, M.A.*) *The service of God pleasant*:—Matthew Henry's deathbed was tranquil as a little child's. Speaking to Mr. Illidge, he said, "You have been used to take notice of the sayings of dying men; this is mine: that a life spent in the service of God, and communion with Him, is the most pleasant life that any one can live in this world." (*A. B. Grosart.*) *Superiority of pious joy*:—I know that sometimes the worldling may seem to have the best of it. He laughs a louder laugh, and is more boisterous in his mirth. He has need to be. He must laugh aloud to convince himself that he is happy. He is obliged to be demonstrative in his merriment, or he could not give himself credit for it. What is the value of it all? Listen to one who had laughed more than most men, or, at any rate, had tried to laugh more: "I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doeth it?" The worldling's joy, such as it is, is fitful and short-lived. It is a fine-weather joy, like that of some of the songsters of the wood; like that of the nightingale, which, though she sings in the night, cannot sing in the wild; like the notes of the blackbird, which die away as the season advances and when her nestlings are all hatched, as though parental anxieties had been too much for her; like the light-heartedness of the cuckoo, which is a summer bird, but has no song to enliven our winter's gloom. The worldly heart has its songs, but they do not last. They are only songs of sunshine, songs of

summer. But the robin sings all the year round. In the spring, upon the orchard spray, canopied with apple blossoms; in the summer, in the still depths of the forest shade; and in the winter, too, on the naked blackthorn, exposing his little red bosom to the wintry blast, he twitters cheerily amid the snows. Such is the Christian's joy, stable and lasting. The other is but a counterfeit, and the tinsel soon wears off. Yonder clown, who by his antics and grimaces upon the stage sets the spectators in a roar, is not a merry man. He has left a sick child at home, and the last look he had at her pale face, as she lay upon her poor pallet in their mean lodging, smote him to the heart, for it told him she was like to die. And from that dying cough he has come to grin and caper at the pantomime to make English holiday. And haunted by that wasted face and those sunken eyes, every jest to him is agony, and every burst of laughter a cruel pang. Such is the pleasure of the sinner, a mere surface mirth, a forced hilarity, with a poisoned barb rankling at the heart. But now religion, the fear of the Lord, is joy, all joy, and always joy. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." "Rejoice . . . and again I say rejoice," is not only a permission, but a command to the Christian. When he is not happy, it is not because of his religion, but because for some reason in himself he has missed its consolations. (*J. Halsey.*)

All her paths are peace.—*The joy of peace.*—The "wisdom" in this passage is distinctly and profoundly ethical. The second clause is not a repetition of the first. Peace and pleasantness are not synonymous terms. The truth of the first clause is dependent upon that of the second. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness, for all her paths are peace." I. THE LIFE OF TRUE WISDOM LAYS ITS FOUNDATIONS IN PEACE. 1. Its beginning is the "fear of the Lord." 2. When in harmonious relations with God, man finds the elements and forces of his inner life take their due posts of subordination and supremacy. Though there is conflict, yet the higher principles govern, the Diviner forces sit upon the throne. 3. The life being thus charged with Divine force cannot be governed by external circumstances. 4. It can know no anxieties touching the issues of the future. 5. Such a life enters into peace as far as possible with all men. Through the universalising of this wisdom the kingdom of peace shall come. II. ON THIS FOUNDATION OF PEACE, AND ON THIS ONLY, CAN TRUE HAPPINESS BE REARED. 1. There can be no true happiness except that which springs from a harmonious life. 2. There can be no full happiness except for such. That which comes from some by-play of the life must be meagre and partial. (*John Thomas, M.A.*)

The enjoyments of religion.—Wisdom denotes a life of piety. I. THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF RELIGION. It was revealed to show us the way of salvation; to guide our feet into the paths of peace; to exalt us to happiness here and to glory hereafter. 1. Consider the doctrines she reveals. Their direct tendency is to banish the fears of guilt, to console, and to animate with joy the fearful heart. 2. Consider the precepts which religion enjoins. Are they not perfective in our nature, and directly conducive to felicity? 3. Consider the promised aid she imparts. A gracious Comforter continually surrounds the godly man, who imparts every needful grace. 4. Consider the glorious rewards she reveals. To every desire of the heart she opens the most unbounded delights—delights commensurate to the widest wishes of the soul, and endless as eternity. II. THE NATURE OF THAT PLEASURE ENJOYED BY THOSE WHO WALK IN THE WAYS OF RELIGION. The subduing of our desires and appetites is necessary to a course of piety; but even self-denial and the Cross become sources of pleasure. II. THE DUTIES WHICH RELIGION ENJOINS HER VOTARIES TO OBSERVE. 1. The joys of prayer and praise. 2. The joys resulting from the sacred services of religion. 3. From meditation on the Scriptures. 4. From observance of the Divine commandments. Such are the pleasures, the delightful feelings, and peaceful satisfactions which result from walking in the ways of religion; and what enjoyments are comparable to these? (*D. Malcolm, LL.D.*)

The pleasure of Christ's ways.—An inclination to pleasure is usually the favourite passion of young people. Here religion is recommended under a view of the delights that attend it. Wisdom here may be taken as a perfection in God, as Christ, or as the grace in us whereby we are made wise unto salvation; for the ways of spiritual wisdom, or of true religion, may be said to be the ways of all these. They are ways originally laid out, adjusted, and directed to by the unerring wisdom of the Eternal Mind; they are the ways that Christ has made known to us, recommended and enjoined by His Word and Spirit, and in part by His own example; and they are the ways that an enlightened and renewed soul understands, approves of, and chooses to walk in. These are ways of pleasantness, including the utmost satisfaction and delight. They are "paths of

peace," including all prosperity and safety. Prosperity and peace are found not only when the end is reached, but also while we are walking in the way; and not merely in some of the ways, but in all of them. I. THE ABSOLUTE VIEW THAT MAY BE TAKEN OF THE PLEASURES TO BE FOUND IN CHRIST'S WAYS. 1. The excellence of Christ's ways themselves. As wisdom's ways, there must be a fulness in them of all that is desirable. We are, in them, conversant with God and Christ, heaven and glory, things spiritual and sublime, holy and good. We are called to have exalted thoughts and estimations of the Lord Jesus, and to delight in Him. It may be said this is only showing the fairest face of religion. There is something to be suffered as well as to be enjoyed in Christ's ways. But nothing we have to suffer can compare with what is to be enjoyed; and the very sufferings bring to us their own joys. 2. The suitableness of these ways to a renewed mind. However good in themselves, if not suitable to our taste and relish, they cannot afford us any pleasures. An unregenerate, carnal temper has no relish for Christ's ways. When regenerate, spiritual, and holy objects, acts, and exercises become agreeable. A renewed mind has a new relish. It delights "in the law of God after the inward man." 3. A sense of the Divine favour and acceptance in Christ's ways, and of our own interest in the great and blessed things we meet with there. 4. A lively hope of the happy and eternal issues of Christ's ways. Who can rate the joy that results from strong and assuring expectations of a blessed and glorious immortality. II. THE COMPARATIVE VIEW THAT MAY BE TAKEN OF THE PLEASURES TO BE FOUND IN CHRIST'S WAYS. They are to be preferred to all others. The pleasures of the mind are more excellent than all the pleasures of sense; and the pleasures of religion are superior to the pleasures of mind. When the gracious soul has most to do with God through Christ, in a way of holy communion with Him, of contemplation and adoration of Him, obedience to Him, delight in Him, and hope of His glory, it is inexpressibly more pleased and better entertained than it possibly can be with the finest speculations and most evident demonstrations of reasons and philosophy. 1 There is more worth and dignity in the pleasure of Christ's ways than in all sensitive enjoyments. There is a true greatness of soul in the contempt of sensual pleasures any farther than they are necessary to the support of this present frail life, and a contentment without them, even when what is necessary for their support is providentially withheld from us. 2. There is more solid satisfaction in this pleasure than in all sensitive enjoyments. The pleasures of the sense rather cloy than satisfy. 3. There is more continuance in this pleasure than in all sensitive enjoyments. The pleasures of sense are all precarious, uncertain, and perishing things. The pleasures of Christ's ways are of an abiding nature: "durable riches" (chap. viii., 18). The good man is satisfied from himself. Believers carry their happiness about them, they carry it within themselves; no bitternesses of the present life can destroy this pleasure. It is true that real Christians are not always rejoicing; but this is not due to any defect in the objects of their pleasures, or in their state and principles, but to their not living and acting up to them. Improvements: (1) Let there be self-reflection, as to what you have found in Christ's way. (2) Let all your taste for pleasure put you upon seeking that which is to be found in Christ's ways. (*John Guyse.*) *The pleasures of religion*:—I. THE CONTROL WHICH A RIGHTEOUS MAN EXERCISES OVER HIS PASSIONS AND DESIRES. A righteous man is a happy man, because he is a free man, and the servant to no inward lust; he can act up to his own decisions, and when he sees what is right, he can do it. If there is wretchedness upon earth, it is to live by a rule which we perpetually violate. The most miserable of human beings are professed sinners, men who despise rule, who look upon their passions as mere instruments of pleasure. Putting aside all religious considerations, there is not a greater mistake than to suppose that a profligate man can be happy. He may seem to be happy because his enjoyments are more visible and ostentatious, but is in truth a very sorry and shallow impostor, who may deceive the young, but is laughed at by the wise, and by all who know in what true happiness consists. The truly happy man is he, who has early discovered that he carries within his own bosom his worst enemies, and that the contest must be manfully entered into. A religious man is happy because he is secure; because it is not in the power of accident or circumstance to disclose any secret guilt; as he is, he has long been; he can refer to the blameless tenor of years, to a mind long exercised in avoiding offence towards God and towards man. II. THE FEELINGS OF CHARITY AND BROTHERLY LOVE WHICH RELIGION ALWAYS INSPIRES. As God has given to one object beautiful colours, and to another grateful odours, He has annexed exquisite feelings of happiness to the performance of every benevolent

action. It is impossible to do good to others without feeling happy from it. The conviction which religion inspires, that a man is not born for himself alone, and the habit which it inculcates, of attention to the interests and feelings of mankind, induces at last that state of calm and permanent satisfaction which the words of Solomon describe. Nothing is more grateful than general love, produced by a long tenor of courtesy, of justice, of active kindness, and of modest respect. III. THE COMFORTS DERIVED FROM THE FUTURE RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE OF RELIGION. A man of proper feeling always suffers from observing the striking disproportion that exists in this world between happiness and merit. It is the severest trial of human patience to witness the respect, honour, and prosperity of bad men. These sad scenes are tolerable to the religious man alone, from that final order and regularity with which he knows they will hereafter be concluded. Wherever he looks, justice in its most perfect shape terminates his view; all guilt is detected, all innocence is brought to light; at the conclusion of all things a never-failing Judge gives to every thinking soul the good and the evil which is its due. Pleasure, then, is gained by being the lord and master of our own hearts, by binding our passions in links of iron; by adapting worldly hopes and fears to the nature of worldly things; by obeying God, by trusting to His providence, by expecting His judgments. (*Sidney Smith.*) *Pleasant ways and peaceful paths* :—The “way” is always longer and broader than the “path.” And the meaning may be this. The more general and public things in religion—things which all see and know—these are “pleasant.” But the things which retire back, and are most unfrequented, and which very few either see or guess, all these are “peace.” The same discrimination is traceable in the verse, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.” Acknowledge God in the great things of life, and He will be sure to guide you in the small ones. Let us take this difference of the “ways” and the “paths” to lead us on in our further consideration of the text. 1. Wisdom’s “way” is, first, a high way. It is always reaching up out of littleness, it ranges at loftier levels, it is above party views, it is a large-minded thing, it is always nearer heaven than earth. And this is very “pleasant,” to be so free and independent of man’s estimates and human judgments, to move in a pure, calm elevation of soul, beyond the common distractions, where the strife, and the noise, and the din, and the confusion does not come. 2. And wisdom’s “way” always has one fixed mark. It throws lesser things aside as it goes, and it goes straight to a goal, and that goal is the glory of God. And this singleness of aim gives a strength to a character; it gives unity to the whole man, and that unity is “pleasantness.” 3. And wisdom’s “way” is a way of usefulness. It always puts usefulness first—before pleasure, before profit. It is a “way” of work. They who work there are always serving, always ministering. Each one has his mission—either he comforts, or he advises, or he teaches. But now let us leave the wider track, and go down to one or two of the more secluded “paths.” For to all it is not always given to walk in “ways of pleasantness,” but none who really look for it shall ever miss the “path of peace.” There is a going out in a man’s heart from its deepest places to Christ. He tells Jesus something which has been long a hidden burden in his mind. And Christ listens to him, and he feels it. And in the little “path” of that secret confession there is a “peace” which no words can tell. And now there is an avenue open between that soul and God. It was an avenue long closed; but now it is open. And an act of faith travels along to the Cross, and brings back a message of pure love, “Your sins are forgiven.” I am quite sure that there is no “peace” worth the name—no “peace” for a moment to be put side by side with the “peace” of the simple feeling—“I am forgiven.” (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. *The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth.—Earthly and heavenly wisdom* :—There is but one wisdom for God and man. Man’s true wisdom is a pattern of God’s wisdom. A man to prosper in the world must get the very same wisdom by which God made and rules the world. In the last hundred years science has improved in a most wonderful way, and is improving every day. This improvement has taken place simply by mankind understanding this text, and obeying it. For more than sixteen hundred years after our Lord’s time mankind seem to have become hardly any wiser about earthly things, nay, even to have gone back; but about two hundred and fifty years ago it pleased God to open the eyes of one of the wisest men who ever lived, Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, and to show him the real and right way of learning by which men can fulfil God’s command to replenish the earth and subdue it. He taught that the only way for man to be wise was to

get God's wisdom, the wisdom with which He had founded the earth, and find out God's laws by which He had made this world. "You can only subdue nature by obeying her." You can only subdue a thing and make it useful to you by finding out the rules by which God made that thing, and by obeying them. If you want to rule, you must obey. If you want to rise to be a master, you must stoop to be a servant. If you want to be master of anything in earth or heaven, you must obey God's will revealed in that thing; and the man who will go his own way, and follow his own fancy, will understand nothing, and master nothing, and get comfort out of nothing in earth or heaven. The same rule which holds good in this earthly world which we do see holds good in the heavenly world which we do not see. The same rules which hold good about men's bodies hold good about their souls. The heavenly wisdom which begins in trusting in the Lord with all our hearts, the heavenly wisdom which is learnt by chastenings and afflictions, and teaches us that we are the sons of God, is the very same wisdom by which God founded the earth, and makes the clouds drop down dew. God's wisdom is one—unchangeable, everlasting, and always like itself; and by the same wisdom by which He made our bodies has He made our souls; and therefore we can, and are bound to, glorify Him alike in our bodies and our spirits, for both are His. Illustrate: The only sure way of getting power over people is by making friends of them, making them love and trust us. The Lord Jesus ate and drank with publicans and sinners, who went out into the highways and hedges, to bring home into God's kingdom poor wretches whom men despised and cast off. Christ also "pleased not Himself." There was the perfect fulfilment of the great law—stoop to conquer. Christ stooped lower than any man, and therefore He rose again higher than all men. (*Charles Kingsley.*) *Divine purpose in nature and revelation:*—Faith in God and the obedience which arises from faith have at all times, and in almost all circumstances, been beset with difficulties. Counter influences to the work of the Holy Spirit of God have been supplied by the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil. But, in addition to this constant action in the same direction of the world, the flesh, and the devil, there are also agencies, which vary with time and place, and the nature of which it is very desirable that we should examine and recognise with reference to the time and place in which our own lot may happen to be cast. Mathematicians are familiar with formulæ composed of terms, one of which shall be constant and the others circulating with the time. I would venture to compare the dangers of infidelity to such a mathematical formula. First you have your great constant term, the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil; strong in Eden as it is now, strong now as it was in Eden; but then you have a number of terms which increase and decrease in magnitude, depending on time and place and circumstances, some such as we can afford to neglect, some which we shall neglect at our peril. Some of the difficulties and trials of faith are not more dangerous than extinct volcanoes, like those of which we find the traces in these islands; some like Vesuvius have been mischievous in time not so long past, and may become mischievous again; others are in active operation and are dangerous now. What corresponds to the active volcano in our time? I. Let me lead up to the answer to this question by first indicating SOME FEW ACTIVE OR CONCEIVABLE DANGERS TO FAITH WHICH DO NOT SEEM TO ME TO BE THE SPECIAL DANGER OF OUR OWN TIME. 1. Suppose, for example, that in an unscientific age people have built up a cosmical system which makes the earth the centre of things, and arranges all else in accordance with this fundamental hypothesis—translating, in fact, into the form of a geocentric theory the mere rough, uncorrected impressions of the senses: and suppose that the theory so constructed comes to be regarded as a truth of Divine revelation, so that men see their theory reflected from the page of Holy Scripture, and not unnaturally consider the truth of one bound up with the truthfulness of the other. Then, it seems manifest, that the first discovery of the fact that the earth is not the centre of the universe, but only a tiny ball, the extinction of which would scarcely affect the solar system, and would be absolutely imperceptible as a loss to the sum of existing matter, would of necessity shake the minds of men who had been led to regard their theory of the heavens and the earth as a portion of revealed truth, and that some would probably fall from their faith. The Church has gone through such an experience as this. The volcano is extinct now. 2. Again, suppose that an artificial theological system has arisen, and that ingenious men, puzzled by the mysteries of Christian faith, have devoted their energies to attempts to explain them; or, if not to explain them, at all events to formulate them, and to make it

possible to express in precise language that which probably language is incapable of expressing. Suppose, for example, that you have a subtle distinction between substance and accidents, and that you apply this distinction to define by language the nature of the presence of Christ in the holy Sacrament: you build up, in fact, the dogma of transubstantiation; and devout worshippers accept the dogma, and to question its truth is considered equivalent to denying the faith itself. What is to happen when the progress of human thought, or the discernment of some God-given teacher, blows the subtle figment of substance and accidents to the winds, and leads men to deny that the presence of Christ can be expressed by any such formula as that which transubstantiation professes to be? Is it not probable that the explosion of a dogma so closely bound up in general opinion with Christian orthodoxy will shake many minds? 3. But there is another danger, not connected with intellectual subtleties, of which the transition from Mediæval to Reformation times affords an example, and of which, unfortunately, there have been examples since. The thing which brought on the Reformation more than anything else was the unholy lives of men—popes, priests, and people. And the want of holiness on the part of those who should be patterns to the flock has ever been, and ever will be, when it is conspicuous, one of the principal stumbling-blocks that can be placed in the way of those who would follow Christ. This volcano is not extinct. I fear it never will be. 4. Once more, it is not so long ago since we were told, on high authority, that the peculiar danger to the faith belonging to our own days was that which arose from the destructive results of modern criticism. But God was with His servants in the burning fiery furnace; and I think I am only saying that which expresses the conclusions of some of our soundest scholars, when I assert that the Gospels have come out of the furnace unhurt, and that the smell of fire has not passed upon them. II. Well, then, what is our special difficulty or danger just now? It seems to me that it may be described by such a phrase as this: **THE DENIAL OF THE BEING OF GOD ON THE GROUND OF SUPPOSED SCIENTIFIC CONCLUSIONS.** "The fool," says the psalmist twice over, "hath said in his heart, There is no God"; and, if it were only the fool who said so, he might very well be left alone in his folly. No, we must accept the fact that a certain number of persons of high scientific position tell us that a careful examination of nature leads to the conclusion that it exhibits no purpose, and that it is all evolved out of primæval matter without any creative power such as that which believers in God are wont to assume. Fix your mind upon this one point. I am going to put out of the question the beneficence of the Creator, and the moral order of the universe, because I wish to concentrate attention upon the one consideration of purpose or design; if there be no design, there cannot well be beneficence or morality, and if there be design, beneficence and morality will (so to speak) take care of themselves. Moreover, design is that which is much more closely connected with physical studies than beneficence and morality. Give me design in the visible region of nature, and I shall have no fear as to the possibility of detecting the manifestation of purpose and will in the region of morals and of grace. But take design out of nature, tell me that the heavens and the earth are spontaneously evolved out of matter (whatever that may mean), that the men, and beasts, and creeping things are one, that the life of man has come from nothing, is nothing, and tends to nothing—and then I confess that all the glory of the universe, all the brightness of existence, all that makes life worth living, seems to me to be gone, and that there is nothing hopeful or joyous left. When I am told by a man of scientific eminence that it is only superficial observers who attribute purpose to nature, and that if I examine sufficiently I shall find that all things come of themselves, it seems to me that this is very much like telling me that ignorant folks may imagine that there is some purpose in locomotive engines, but that if any one will visit Crewe, and see them made, he will put aside all notion of purpose as unworthy of an educated mind. The ordinary observer who sees a train pass at full speed may have an ignorant feeling of wonder at the machine which moves it, while the careful observer in the factory will see that, after all, a locomotive engine is a comparatively simple affair, and easily made when you know how to do it; but there need be, and there ought to be, no difference of opinion as to the wisdom by which the locomotive was made and the understanding by which it was established. And so life is as completely a mystery, and as truly Divine, whether you read in Genesis that God spake the word and living things were made, or whether you read in modern books of the evolution of protoplasm. I take my stand upon design as upon a foundation stone; if any one denies it, I can go no further; to attempt to do so would be like

discussing optics with a person who did not believe in sunshine, or geometry with a man who denied Euclid's axioms. Granting, however, the existence of design within the small region of our own experience, we feel a logical and imperative necessity of postulating design beyond that region. This necessity extends, I think, to the whole material universe. I, who can examine my own frame and the mechanism of the world, and the countless arrangements by which the order of things is maintained, feel myself compelled to conclude that the same principle extends to those parts of the universe which I cannot so directly or so completely examine. I know that gravitation and light extend over space immeasurable, I can have no doubt as to the principle of design extending quite as far; in fact, I feel it to be an inevitable, if not an absolutely logical, conclusion, that the whole material universe is the outcome of one mind, and is governed by that same mind. But this is not the whole of the argument, or even the most important part of it. The transition from design in the material world to purpose in the moral world seems inevitable. Great intellects amongst ourselves do not employ themselves in merely making ingenious toys; the steam-engine would never have been constructed if the comfort of man and the needs of commerce had not demanded it. And this world deprived of its moral aspects, what would it be but a gigantic toy? Is it conceivable that there should be design in every sinew, and nerve, and limb of which man's body is composed, and no purpose in those thoughts, and affections, and feelings, and aspirations, and hopes, which are as truly a part of himself as his heart or his lungs? Let it be granted that purpose in nature is a delusion, and that evolution will explain everything, and then, no doubt, this argument all vanishes; if there be no purpose in nature, then it is impossible to argue that there is any purpose extending beyond nature; but let it be once admitted that the hand and brain of man are full of purpose, and then I think it is difficult not to extend the admission from the wonderful region in which man's hand and brain are occupied to a more wonderful region still, which transcends nature altogether. In other words, it is difficult to believe that God, having manifested a great purpose in the formation of man, has not a still greater purpose concerning him and his destiny. The step from nature to revelation, though in one sense a long one, in another sense seems to be no step at all; the purpose of which I have, as I believe, a clear proof in natural science, indicates a deeper and better, though more mysterious purpose still. Man's endowments are too great for the mere prince or primus of the animal world; his spiritual nature is "cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd" in a mere mortal tenement of flesh and blood; and, therefore, when I read of God speaking to man, making His will known, giving him commands which it is life to obey and death to resist, condescending to receive from man worship and love, I seem to find in all this the proper corollary to all that nature teaches me concerning design in the construction of man; it makes man, of course, a more mysterious being than he would otherwise have seemed to be; but, on the other hand, it makes the history of man—taken as a whole—more simple and more intelligible, because it supplies an adequate solution of the questions, What is man? and Why was man created? And thus we seem to pass by a safe and sure path from the simplest indication of design in nature to the highest doctrine of Divine revelation. Oh, what has happened in these latter years of the world's history to snatch from us the blessed inheritance of faith in God, which has come down to us from the days of our fathers? "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth"—is there anything in science to deprive us of this great truth? Does not science emphasise the word "Maker," and at least nod assent when the human heart adds the word "Father"? And though science may have got to the end of its teaching in this article of the creed, is there not something in the conception of a God and Father, which leads up to the belief in a revelation made to His children through "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord"? And certainly if Jesus Christ be accepted in the fulness of His manifested being, there can be little difficulty in accepting as the crown of Divine Revelation the blessed truth of the being of "the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life." If I am told that scientific discovery is depriving me of all that I most value, if men who pretend to guide me declare that the faith of Christendom is folly, and desire again to raise altars to "The Unknown God," if I am told that there is no purpose in nature and that therefore I myself am purposeless and meaningless, a mere bubble upon the infinite stream of time, am I not justified in contending with all my might against such a pitiless system, and in claiming God as my Father, and the knowledge of Him as my most precious possession? (*Bp. Harvey Goodwin.*)

Ver. 20. The clouds drop down the dew.—*The sea night-mist of Palestine*:—There is a very remarkable and regular provision of Nature, peculiar to Bible lands, which may be observed in a first sight of Palestine on any night in the hot season when a west wind is blowing. I allude to the sea night-mist of the hot season. It explains in a very striking and hitherto unsuspected manner the numerous occurrences of the Hebrew word *tal*, uniformly rendered “dew” in the Authorised Version of the Bible. Some of these have presented hitherto unanswerable difficulties, such as the statement of the wise man that “the clouds drop down the ‘dew’” (chap. iii. 20), which, if “dew” in the scientific sense of the word is understood, is just what they do not, no dew ever forming when clouds are about. Again, the words in Isaac’s blessing, “God give thee of the ‘dew’ of heaven” (Gen. xxvii. 28); those of Moses, summing up the precious things of heaven in the “dew” (Deut. xxxiii. 13); the power of an absolute eastern king being likened to “a ‘dew’ upon the grass” (chap. xix. 12); and Israel’s future influence amongst the nations to “a ‘dew’ from Jehovah” (Micah v. 7); such words as these, and those in many other passages, bespeak a peculiar excellence and value which dew does not possess even amongst us, and still less in Palestine, where it only occurs in the winter, the time of abundant heavy rains, which render it comparatively useless! It was my good fortune, as a result of my residence in Jerusalem, to discover the deeply interesting natural feature which is called in our version “dew,” and fully to realise in what its importance and excellence consists (Hos. xiv. 5). From the end of April till about the end of October no drop of rain falls; while each day, for some ten or twelve hours, the sun shines with great strength, unveiled by a single cloud. This fierce wind is in May and October intensified by a burning wind, the sirocco, which gathers its withering, scorching power as it sweeps over the vast sands of the Arabian desert, and is the awful “east wind” of the Bible. During this period, but more especially at its close, in September and October, the west wind, which then prevails, comes up laden with moisture from the Mediterranean Sea, which is condensed in low-lying clouds of mist as soon as it reaches the land. These cloud-masses sweep along near the ground, leaving behind them an immense amount of what is misnamed in our version “dew,” but which is really a very fine, gentle rain in the form of a light Scotch mist. Its great excellence consists—1. In its coming only in the hottest and driest season, when no other moisture can be had. 2. In its only coming during the night, “when no man can work,” and so interfering in no way with the business or pleasures of life. 3. In its coming in such rich abundance as far to exceed the moisture deposited by any formation of dew. 4. In its coming in such fine particles and moderate quantities as not even to hurt the gathered grain lying out on the open-air threshing-floors. 5. In its effects ceasing as soon as the sun is hot, and so leaving no miasmatic or other injurious results behind, whence it is well called by Hosea, “the night-mist which early goes away.” This explanation exactly accounts for “the clouds” being said “to drop” it down, which is just what they do. Very beautiful are the silvery shining mist-clouds which may be seen as the day dawns being drawn up and dissolved into thin air, the fugitive clouds to which Hosea (vi. 4) compares Israel’s brief and transient seasons of goodness—“Your goodness is like the morning cloud, and like the night-mist (*tal*) which early goes away.” It also displays the naturalness of the great amount of *tal*, or “night-mist,” which fell miraculously on Gideon’s fleece (Judg. vi. 38). It adds a new intensity to our Saviour’s pathetic appeal in Canticles v. 2, “Open to Me . . . for My head is filled with the night-mist (*tal*), and My locks with the drops of the night.” There is an icy chill often attending exposure to the “night-mist” which is not experienced on a dewy night, the latter being always fine. In a word, let “night mist” be written in each of the thirty-four places in our Bible where “dew” occurs, and it will be found to give a new meaning and a new beauty in every instance! What fresh point and power now clothe the gracious promise in Hosea xiv. 5, “I will be as the night-mist (*tal*) to Israel!” and also that beautiful but difficult passage, Psalm cx. 3! (*James Neil, M.A.*)

Vers. 21–23. My son, let not them depart from thine eyes: keep sound wisdom and discretion.—*Fidelity to principle*:—The advantages connected with fidelity to the ethics of godliness are here sketched. I. **LIFE.** The principles of heavenly wisdom—1. Originate spiritual life. 2. Nurture spiritual life. II. **ORNAMENT.** “Grace to thy neck.” This gracefulness of soul is an ornament—1. Becoming to all. 2. Within the reach of every man. 3. Admired by the highest intelligences.

4. Imperishable in its nature. III. SAFETY. God is the guide and guardian of the faithful. IV. COURAGE. It is one thing to be safe and another thing to feel safe. A feeling of safety may well make us courageous. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Securing wisdom when we have it* :—We are not called to be mere idolaters of wisdom, but to keep it in the heart, with the distinct idea of reproducing it in an obedient and pure life. Wisdom rightly used is increased in amount and energy. It is not a mere decoration, a medal to be worn on the breast, or a badge to proclaim superiority of class ; it is a life-generating force, living ever in the soul for its enlargement and establishment in goodness. (*Joseph Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. *Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.*—*The peaceful slumbers of the righteous* :—Slumber is the common privilege of thousands undistinguished by any great virtue. But slumber may be the ordinary effect of nature. While there is no physical ailment or deep sorrow to hinder it, it is the natural result of weariness and daily toil. The slumbers of the text are those which come through freedom from fear. I. THE SECURITY OF A GOOD MAN'S REST. The body demands rest. To withhold this rest, or to give it reasonable limits, is moral suicide. When the good man lies down he is not to be afraid. Afraid of what? Of bodily danger and accidents and calamities. It is an instinct to have more fear in the darkness than in the light. It is in the night that we dread the outbreak of the smouldering spark ; it is the night which favours the robber's murderous purpose ; it is the night which adds terrors to the lightning flash and to the storm. The promise of the text supplies a rational warrant for calm security. You may sleep and take your rest, for He that keepeth Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The powers of evil shall not destroy further than may be consistent with the Divine designs of mercy, or with an overruling purpose for good. It is a promise that in lying down we need not be afraid of death. When we close our eyes in slumber we know not in which of two worlds we may wake again. We can only overcome the fear of death by knowing that we have a part in Him who is the destroyer of death. How may we lay down and not be afraid? Only by endeavouring that, whether we wake in one world or another, we may have Christ with us at our rising. II. THY SLEEP SHALL BE SWEET. This is a second privilege of the good. 1. Sleep is sweetened by the thought of duties attempted, if not duties done. We are all unprofitable servants, but that is no reason why we should be slothful servants. 2. Sleep is sweet through an enjoyed sense of the Divine forgiveness. It cannot be a healthy sleep which men enjoy while the pillow is pressed by a weight of unpardoned, unrepented sin. 3. Sleep may be sweetened by kind and charitable thoughts towards all mankind. Cultivate those dispositions which minister to a holy and gentle charity. Conclusion. You must share in the good man's labour if either in this life or in that which is to come you would share in the good man's rest. Sleep to the labouring man is sweet, so also is the sleep of the labouring Christian. His struggles with sin, his contest with the world, the labour of keeping the heart right, and the hands pure, and the eye single, and the ways direct—these are things which make rest needful for him, which give refreshment to his slumbers and repose to his rest. And this warfare of the Christian every day, followed by a night of rest, is but a type of the whole warfare of time followed by the Sabbath rest of eternity. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*)

Vers. 25, 26. *Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh. For the Lord shall be thy confidence.*—*Confident attitude of God's people* :—When God is abroad in judgments, He would not have His people alarmed. He has not come forth to harm, but to defend the righteous. 1. HE WOULD HAVE THEM MANIFEST COURAGE. We who enjoy the presence of God ought to display presence of mind. Since the Lord Himself may suddenly come, we ought not to be surprised at anything sudden. Serenity under the rush and roar of unexpected evils is a precious gift of Divine love. II. THE LORD WOULD HAVE HIS CHOSEN DISPLAY DISCRIMINATION, so that they may see that the desolation of the wicked is not a real calamity to the universe. Sin alone is evil ; the punishment which follows thereupon is as a preserving salt to keep society from putrefying. We should be far more shocked at the sin which deserves hell than at the hell which comes out of sin. III. So, too, should THE LORD'S PEOPLE EXHIBIT GREAT QUIETNESS OF SPIRIT. Satan and his serpent seed are full of all subtilty ; but those who walk with God shall not be taken in their deceitful snares. Go on, believe in Jesus, and let the Lord be thy confidence. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 27. **Withhold not good from them to whom it is due.**—*A plea for the shopmen:*—When the first man had fallen into sin labour was imposed upon him as a punishment. And yet there was mercy mingled with the judgment. That stern necessity which forced man to eat bread in the sweat of his brow became one of his purest and sweetest sources of enjoyment. What would the world be without labour? Do we not owe to it the occupation of time which otherwise would be a burden too heavy to bear? Is it not indispensable to our mental and physical vigour, to the healthy mind in the healthy body? And does it not contribute, directly and indirectly, to our best and most enduring pleasures? But the labour is as God imposed it upon man. Not labour that is incessant, or, in itself, unfriendly to the interests of body or mind. Man has too frequently made labour a curse. To bring back labour to the position which it held after the expulsion from paradise, to guard its rights, and to render industrial occupation a help rather than a hindrance to the progress of humanity are objects of noble and Godlike enterprise.

I. THIS PURPOSE IS GOOD. 1. It is good personally. Putting wise limitations on labour is good for the body, for the mind, for the soul. 2. It is good relatively. Good for employers—good for their interests, for their consciences. It is good for the commonwealth and for the Church.

II. THIS MOVEMENT FOR THE LIMITATION OF LABOUR IS JUST. Young men have a right to a fair portion of time to be used as they think best. We speak not now of expediency, but of lawful claim. They have a right to be happy. It is a sin to stop any fellow-creature from being happy. We commit this sin if we help to place impediments in his way so that he cannot obtain his share of joy. They have a right to advance their own interests. Young people may have no golden opportunities because they have no leisure. They have a right to fulfil some moral design. What this should be, each young man should find out specifically for himself. He is then bound to effectuate it. And he has a right to demand from society opportunity to obey the divinely implanted impulse. He must have breathing time, time for moral achievements.

III. THE DEMAND FOR SHORTER HOURS OF LABOUR IS ALSO PRACTICABLE. It can be done. Late hours are not indispensable. A little domestic arrangement would make it just as easy to purchase in the broad daylight as in the dark evening hour. (*W. M. Whittemore, S.C.L.*)

Withholding dues:—Many are the forms of this dishonesty, borrowing without payment, evading the taxes, keeping back the labourer's hire. But the rule probes deeper than this surface. If we have no legal debt to any, we have a gospel debt to all. Even the poor is bound by this universal law of his poorer neighbour. Every one has a claim upon our love. Every opportunity of doing good is our call to do so. (*C. Bridges, M.A.*)

Beneference:—**I. HUMAN BENEFEQUENCE HAS ITS CLAIMANTS.** 1. What you have is given in trust. 2. It is given you for distribution. **II. HUMAN BENEFEQUENCE IS ONLY LIMITED BY INCAPACITY.** Our power is the measure of our obligation. **III. HUMAN BENEFEQUENCE SHOULD EVER BE PROMPT IN ITS SERVICES.** 1. Because the postponement of any duty is a sin in itself. 2. Because the neglect of a benevolent impulse is injurious to self. 3. Because the claimant may seriously suffer by a delay of your help. **IV. HUMAN BENEFEQUENCE EXCLUDES ALL UNKINDNESS OF HEART.** True charity thinketh no evil. A selfish heart is an evil desire. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

The duty of charity:—**I. CHARITY, AS OF MORAL OBLIGATION, STANDS AT THE HEAD OF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE.** It is not a duty purely of positive command and institution, but in its own nature, and by a constant and eternal obligation. The Jews easily confounded things morally good and evil with things made good and evil by positive command. The distinction was vigorously set forth by the prophets. Charity, then, is the principal duty of our religion, as being universal and indispensable and a perfection in its own nature. **II. CHARITY IS THE NEAREST IMITATION OF THE DIVINE NATURE AND PERFECTIONS THAT WE ARE CAPABLE OF.** The Divine perfections are not imitable by us, as to the degree and extent of them. They are all infinite in God. We may do good according to our power and in our sphere. God will accept according to that a man hath. **III. THIS GOOD DISPOSITION OF MIND IS MADE ONE OF THE IMMEDIATE CONDITIONS OF OUR FUTURE HAPPINESS.** The virtue of charity is an immediate gospel-condition of our future happiness, and it is a natural cause of it, or such a temper of mind as may be called beatific. In the nature of things, it prepares men for admission into the quiet regions of peace and love. This is also a virtue proper and necessary to this life, without which the world cannot subsist. This earth is the only stage where this virtue can and must be exercised. It is not easy to prescribe rules, measures, and proportions to men's charity, but neither is it necessary. (*Francis Asbury, D.D.*)

The duty of charity stated and enforced:—That charity in general is a duty nobody

will deny. But many, on account of particular circumstances, think themselves entirely discharged from the performance of it. Many, though they own the obligation, yet disown it in its due degrees. I. WHO ARE THE PERSONS OBLIGED TO GIVE TO CHARITABLE USES, AND IN WHAT PROPORTION? By charitable uses is meant the relief of the helpless, the sick, the needy, &c. The great, the opulent, and the able should undertake the principal share in this duty. They are stewards, and must give an account. Their good deeds ought to bear proportion to their abilities. Everybody looks with abhorrence upon a man who is ever amassing riches without laying anything out in charitable uses; as greedy as the sea and as barren as the shore. Those whose circumstances are but just easy, who can only just meet the demands of their families, claim to be totally exempted from the performance of this duty. But often such persons have secret indulgences, which form their real excuse. Those in straitened circumstances think they have nothing to do in the works of charity. Rich and poor are equally concerned in the duty, but in proportion to their circumstances. He that has little is as strictly bound to give something out of that little as he that has more is obliged to give more. Charity consists in doing the best we can and doing it with a willing mind. The smallest present imaginable may be the greatest bounty. The only persons who have a fair right of pleading an entire exemption from this duty are those whose circumstances are deeply involved; for until we can satisfy our creditors we ought not to relieve the poor. It would be unjust to give away what is not our own. There is much difficulty in pitching upon any fixed and stated proportion short of which our charity ought not to fall. Where the determinate measure of duty is not or cannot be assigned, there men's interests or covetousness will be ever suggesting excuses for the non-performance of it. In this we ought to follow the rule laid down in all doubtful cases, *i.e.*, to choose the part which is least dangerous. In the exercise of charity we should rather exceed than fall short, for fear of incurring the guilt of uncharitableness. The Jews had to appropriate the tenth part of their revenue every three years to charitable uses. This was a thirtieth part of their yearly revenue. We should not at any time fall short of this measure. II. WHO ARE THE PERSONS QUALIFIED TO RECEIVE OUR CHARITY? 1. We ought rather to succour the distressed than increase the happiness of the easy, because we are to do the most good we can. Even the bad are to be relieved in cases of extreme necessity. 2. The best charity we can give to the poor that have ability and strength is to employ them in work, that they may not contract an habit of idleness. 3. Those suffering reverse of fortune are proper objects of charity. 4. Fatherless children demand our care. Charity is misplaced upon vagrants and common beggars, who may be counterfeits. 5. The sick have claim upon our charity. III. THE MANNER IN WHICH WE ARE TO DISPENSE OUR CHARITY. Acts of mercy should be both public and private. If charity were entirely secret, removed from the eye of the world, it would decay and dwindle into nothing. If charity were always done in public, it would degenerate into mere hypocrisy, formality, and outward show. Care is necessary not to be influenced by ostentation or any sinister motive. An action good in itself is greatly recommended by an agreeable manner of doing it, an agreeable manner being to actions what a lively manner of expression is to our sense—it beautifies and adorns it, and gives it all the advantage whereof it is capable. It is our duty not only to have virtue, but to make our virtue truly amiable. A delicacy of this kind is most chiefly to be observed with those who have not been used to receive charity. IV. THE MOTIVES TO CHARITY. 1. Compassion. As ingrafted in us this is mere instinct; as cultured and cherished it becomes a virtue. 2. The pleasure of benevolence. He that centres all his regard upon himself, exclusively of others, has placed his affections very oddly; he has placed them on the most worthless object in the world—himself. V. THE RECOMPENSE OF THE REWARD. At the last day the question will not be whether you have been negatively good, whether you have done no harm, but what good have you done? Our Saviour has made the poor His representatives. The riches that we have given away will remain with us for ever. When we have shown mercy to our fellow-creatures we may safely expect it from our Creator. (*J. Seed, M.A.*)

Vers. 28–35. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give.—*Neighbourliness*.—I. WHAT IS DUE TO OTHERS? (ver. 27). There is a sense in which debt should be avoided, and a sense in which all men must be always over head and ears in it (Rom. xiii. 8). Love is a debt that can never be discharged. As followers of Christ we must love always and love all. Some men

are neighbours because they reside in the same street, and all men are neighbours because they reside on the same planet. "Shivering," says Dr. Punshon, "in the ice-bound, or scorching in the tropical, regions, in the lap of luxury, or in the wild hardihood of the primeval forest—belting the globe in a tired search for rest, or quieting his life amid the leafy shade of ancestral woods, gathering all the decencies around him like a garment, or battling in the fierce raid of crime in a world which has disowned him, there is an inner human-ness everywhere which binds that man to me by a primitive and by an indissoluble bond." II. THE NEEDS OF OTHERS. Real goodness is—1. Practical. It finds expression in giving. All nature is redolent of such beneficence. The earth gives fruit; the sky gives rain; the sun gives light. So is it with nature's God. He gave, says one, "the best thing in heaven for the worst thing on earth." 2. Prompt. It says, not to-morrow, but to-day—not by and by, but now. "Keep," says William Arnot, "as few good intentions hovering about as possible." A kind deed done quickly is twice done, and if some deeds are not done quickly they will never be done at all. III. THE CONFIDENCE OF OTHERS (ver. 29). Evil growing out of a betrayal of confidence is one of the worst forms of evil. There are confidences of—1. A national character. Israel rested upon the staff of Egypt, but it turned out to be "a bruised reed" (2 Kings xviii. 21). 2. A friendly character. Such confidence was betrayed by Abithophel (Psa. xli. 9), and by Judas (John xiii. 18). 3. A business character. The confidence of an employer in his assistant. This may be betrayed by wasting the master's goods (Luke xvi. 1), or by misappropriating them (Exod. xx. 15; Eph. iv. 28). IV. THE INTEGRITY OF OTHERS (ver. 30). The strife of law courts has brought misery to thousands of innocent people. Some people are always inventing grievances. V. THE SINS OF OTHERS (ver. 31). Oppression is opposed to neighbourliness. Some modern employers of labour will surely stand aghast when the time for this reckoning comes. Well might the wise man say of such, "Choose none of his ways." VI. TO OURSELVES (vers. 32-35). Goodness has its reward. Two companion pictures teach this by a graphic contrast. 1. The hatred *versus* the friendship of the Lord. From the unneighbourly God turns away, but His face is towards the upright. To enjoy the friendship of God we must be the friends of men. 2. The curse *versus* the blessing of the Lord. To bless is to be blessed. The merciful shall obtain mercy. (H. Thorne.)

Ver. 30. **Strive not with a man without a cause.**—*Strife*:—I. As A PRINCIPLE INHERENT IN THE SOUL. There is a battling instinct in every human mind. Man is made to antagonise. The principle is intended to put us into antagonism—1. Not against existence, but against the evils of existence. 2. Not against God, but against the enemies of God. II. As A PRINCIPLE LIABLE TO PERVERSION. (D. Thomas, D.D.) *Negative goodness*:—Here we are called to do good negatively. The strife-loving disposition is fatal to culture, solidity of goodness, and every instinct of beneficence. Where strife is, God is not. Where there is cause of strife be careful to ascertain its true quality. It must be a cause so evident and so righteous that there can be no dispute about it. Some minds are ingenious in creating causes of strife, and they justify themselves by blinding themselves. Strength is itself a temptation. Who can be strong and yet civil? Unjust contentions degrade their authors. False accusations need further lies for their defence and support. Whom we begin by ill-treating we end by hating. (Joseph Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 31. **Envy thou not the oppressor.**—*The oppressor*:—He is a common character. There is the political oppressor, the social oppressor, the ecclesiastical oppressor. I. HIS CHARACTER IS NOT TO BE ENVIED. 1. Because envy is in itself an evil. 2. Because there is nothing in the oppressor to be desired. II. HIS CONDUCT IS NOT TO BE FOLLOWED. Stand aloof (Psa. xxxvii. 1). (D. Thomas, D.D.) *The oppressor not to be envied*:—Whether public or private, the man who "grinds the faces of the poor" by severity and extortion, may succeed, may prosper; may, by this means, amass a fortune, and rise to still higher honour. He is not to be envied; not only because envy is in itself wrong, but also because there is really nothing in his character and career to produce it. His prosperity is not to be envied even by the poorest and most suffering victim of his oppression. And while he is not to be envied, far less are his ways to be imitated for the sake of obtaining the envied results—the same wealth, the same greatness, the same power. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

Ver. 33. **The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked.**—*In what sense, and in what cases, a curse may still extend to Christians :—*I. CHRISTIANS ARE MOST CERTAINLY EXPOSED TO THE DIVINE CURSE, IF GUILTY OF THE SINS TO WHICH IT APPERTAINS. There is no curse remaining for the believing and the penitent. But still there is a curse retained on record, and it must be as surely kept for some beneath the gospel as it ever was aforetime. There are some who are cold and selfish, who have no root of Christian tenderness, nor any spirit of believing love; who take no pity on the poor, the stranger, or the naked. If neglect brings curse, how much more must positive wrong. Our Saviour speaks of the condemned in general terms as “the workers of iniquity.” There is, then, a possibility of curse yet remaining beneath the covenant of grace. II. MAKE DETAILED EXAMINATION OF ONE OR TWO OF THE MORE SECRET OF THE SINS THAT TOO MANY CHRISTIANS ARE GUILTY OF.

1. “Cursed is he that removeth his neighbour’s landmark.” The Christian translation of this is, “Let no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.”

2. “Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of his way.” In a moral and spiritual sense this reads, “Cursed is he who imposeth upon the simple, the credulous, the unwary, the ignorant, or the helpless, and either wilfully deceives, misleads, corrupts, or plunders any of these, for selfish or unworthy purpose of his own.” (*John Miller, M.A.*)

*The curse and the blessing :—*I. THE DIFFERENT CHARACTERS HERE MENTIONED. All men are sinful, but all men are not wicked, in the sense of being immoral. The “just” are the sincere and renewed of mankind.

II. THE DIFFERENT PORTION ASSIGNED TO EACH. On the house of the wicked a curse, on the habitation of the just a blessing. The curse of the law, of a troubled conscience, of a neglected gospel, of a judgment to come. The blessing comes by God “making all things work together for good.” The blessing of God is upon the table of the just, upon their sorrows, upon their toils, upon their families—in a word, upon their souls. They are blessed with peace and light and liberty—with all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. (*American National Preacher.*)

*Different characters and destinies :—*I. THE DIFFERENCE OF CHARACTER. The doctrine of the corruption of human nature should always be viewed in connection with the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of the death of Christ. As this redemption extends to all mankind, all are consequently placed in a state of trial. And this leads to the difference of character mentioned in the text. Some receive and improve the grace that is offered to them; others refuse and oppose it. Hence all the inhabitants of the world are divided into two distinct classes of character. By the “wicked” we are to understand all that vast multitude who take this world for their portion. The “house of the wicked” means every family where the love and fear of God are not the ruling principles. The “just” means one who accepts and improves the grace offered him in the gospel; whose religion is seated in the heart and is displayed in the life. A just person is governed by a principle of love to God and of love to man. The “habitation of the just” means a family where religion is the principal thing. The members of such a family act uprightly, according to their different stations. II. THE DIFFERENT STATES OF THOSE TO WHOM THESE CHARACTERS SEVERALLY BELONG.

1. The curse of the wicked. They are not, however, always in an afflicted state. The expression means that, whatever their outward circumstances, God does not look favourably upon them. When God’s blessing is withdrawn nothing but curse remains.

2. The blessing of the just. It lies in the continual favour, protection, and presence of God. Not necessarily in outward circumstances. “All things work together for their good.” Observe—1. That the characters and states of mankind have been always the same in every age of the world, and they will continue to be so till time shall cease.

2. That the difference of character necessarily leads to a difference of state. (*J. S. Pratt, B.C.L.*)

*God’s curse and blessing :—*1. God’s curse is on wicked men in all their ways. Their poverty, losses, and crosses are not properly trials, but beginnings of sorrows.

2. God’s blessing is on godly men in all their doings. If they have but little, they have content with it. God will turn poverty into plenty if He sees it best so to do. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

*Moral contrasts in character and destiny :—*There are in human life great contrasts of character, and these are accompanied by corresponding contrasts in the lot and destiny of men. Three examples in verses 33–35. All three, however, resolve themselves into the general distinction and opposition between right and wrong which run through the whole of life.

I. LET US SEEK TO BRING THAT RADICAL CONTRAST BEFORE OUR MINDS IN A GENERAL VIEW. What is right? What is wrong?

1. The words themselves give us some hint of what we mean and what we feel, for

right is the same as direct, straight, and wrong is the same as wrung, twisted, turned, perverted from that which is straight and direct. There are actions and habits of mind which we feel to be in some sense straight, direct, right; others which we feel to be wrong—that is, which deviate from that which is straight. There are other words, referring to moral distinctions, which contain the same idea. A good man is constantly spoken of in the Scriptures as an upright man—a man upright in heart. A bad man is often spoken of as a perverse, a froward man; he is one who turns aside from the right way; his ways are crooked; and so on. But, so far, we have nothing more than an analogy before our minds. The word informs us that we have gathered our notion of something belonging to the mind and feelings from something that has been seen by the bodily senses in the world outside us; that is all. It tells us that our ideas of right and wrong resemble our ideas of a straight or a curved line. But we want to know not merely what right and wrong resemble, but, if possible, what they are in themselves. 2. Do you mean that what you call a right action is a useful action, and what you call a wrong action is a hurtful action? The opinion before us is, that the experience of mankind, gradually forming and accumulating through the ages of the past, has ascertained certain things to be helpful, and certain other things to be injurious, to its welfare, and that we have learned to name the one class of things right, and the other wrong. (1) If this theory, which identifies the right with the socially useful, and the wrong with the socially injurious, be true, why should we need two sets of words to express the same idea? When a man has done a generous action, or spoken the truth in the face of a strong temptation to speak falsehood, why should we not say he has acted usefully, instead of saying he has acted rightly? (2) Again, refer this question to your own feelings. When these words—useful, right—are pronounced in your hearing, and you take in their respective meanings, do they not awaken two entirely different feelings in your mind? You may, indeed, feel about a particular act that it is both right and useful at the same time; still, that is not one, but two feelings in regard to the action, which happen for the moment to meet and be blended in your mind. On the other hand, there are many actions in regard to which you have one of these feelings and not the other present to your mind. You say, "It was a useful deed, it was very convenient; but it was not right after all." You have a sense of utility which is gratified by what has been done; you have another and a higher feeling about right and wrong, which is dissatisfied and displeased by what has been done. (3) Again, if you take a general survey of men's actions, you will be led to the same conclusion. What do you say of the act in which one man rushes forward in a moment of sudden opportunity and takes the life of his fellow-man? What do you say of assassination, of murder? Is it right—can anything in the world ever make such an act other than wrong? Yet such an act has often turned out in the highest degree useful to society. 3. Is our feeling about right and wrong the same essentially as our feeling about beauty and ugliness? All that is right is beautiful; but there is much that is beautiful that is not right. 4. I take my stand, then—fearless of contradiction from any really awakened conscience—upon this position: your feeling for right is superior to every other single feeling of your nature. It is the noblest part of your feeling for God, and every other feeling—that for use and that for beauty, that for self and that for society—stands in a lower and subordinate relation to it: like servants in the presence of their master. Your conscience is your master, and woe to you if you seek to put any other passion into the lordly seat which conscience holds—if you would make that part of your nature the slave which something within you says you were Divinely made to obey. II. APPLICATION OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO THE TEXT. 1. The "wicked" is spoken of, and the "just" is spoken of. These names, these characters, can never be interchanged. Who is the wicked man? He is one who is the slave of his lower feelings—his appetites, his passions, his lusts, his comforts and conveniences, and who is the constant rebel to the law of right, to God within his soul. Who is the just man? He is the man who obeys and follows, because he reveres the right, the God revealed in the soul; and who makes every other part and passion, every comfort and convenience, give way to and follow in the wake of the highest. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the former, and cannot but rest thereon, and there must remain until the falsehood of his heart and life be removed. The blessing of the Lord is on the habitation of the latter—is necessarily there, as God is true and faithful in His ways. As the blade of grass catches on its summit the pearly globe of heaven's dew, so the blessing of the Most High is caught by every upward-looking, obedient, praying

heart. 2. Again, there is the scorner, and there is the lowly man. These names, these characters, cannot be confounded with one another. Who is the scorner? The man who has lifted his pride and egotism into the seat where conscience ought to be; who obeys that dark and irrational passion; who is swollen with self-idolatry instead of bending in the sense of his littleness before the God who made him. And the lowly—who is he? The man who feels and owns himself to be low and God to be high; himself to be little and God to be great; himself to be sinful and seamed with faults, and God to be the Holy Father of his spirit. The former is and will be an object of Heaven's scorn; for who is so worthy of the deepest contempt as a human creature the slave of pride? and a scorned object he must remain until his proud heart be broken. But to the lowly grace, or favour, is given; for God is faithful, and grants to men their true needs. Heaven stoops to those who know that they cannot of themselves rise to heaven. 3. There is the wise man and there is the fool; and these names and characters can never really be confused. For who is the wise man? He who lives, and ever seeks to live, according to the best light given to him; who reveres the nature God has bestowed upon him; who prayerfully and humbly endeavours to be true to it. And who is the fool? Just the opposite of this. One who "plays the fool" with the glorious nature God has given; breaks down its holy landmarks by letting loose the swine and tigers of his evil passions into it; defiles the temple of his body by vice; does his best to put out the eyes of his conscience, and fling the dethroned ruler of his nature into prison and darkness. Glory, eternal glory and life, shall be the portion of the former; but shame the promotion (or exaltation) of the latter! What terrible irony, what scathing satire, in that word! "Exalted" to shame! "Promoted" to disgrace! Advanced in the ranks of ignominy and dishonour! (E. Johnson, M.A.)

Ver. 34. *Surely He scorneth the scorners.*—*Why God scorns the scorner*:—I. THE SCORNER AS GOD SEES HIM. God is described as spurning the scorner, but at the same time His love points out the right way to those who are anxious to overcome evil. The scorner whispers "cant" of all religious forms and expressions. II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE SCORNER. A man who makes religion the butt of his ridicule is very apt to win a certain admiration from the young and the weak-minded. Nothing is easier than for a man to set up as a cynic. Let him pick out the weak points in every one but himself, let him see in every subject the suggestion of a bad extreme, and his equipment is complete. God scorns the scorner because he degrades Divine work. There is nothing in the world so pure but some of these scorners see a blemish in it. They see only the baser side of everything; the bad something in every page of Holy Writ. A cynical Christian is a contradiction in terms. The man who would frustrate his own side deserves to be branded a failure. The Church never had so much need of men who will press forward in the Christian race as to-day. Find your highest type of mankind in whoever tries to make the world better and to stand openly for God. (Abp. A. Mackay-Smith.) *The scorn of scorn*:—But how can one feel a scorn of scorn without himself coming into the same condemnation? And when we venture to say of God that He "scorneth the scorners," do we not seem to charge upon the Judge the identical fault for which He Himself is passing sentence upon the offender? The answer to these questions lies here. Feelings, like actions, derive their moral character to a great extent from circumstances. What is sin under ordinary circumstances is, in the special case of the executioner, innocence. It seems to be a necessary feature of the law of retribution that like should be punished by like; so that this scorning of the scorner comes under the same head as the slaying of the slayer. And yet it is not every one who may slay the slayer, neither is it every one who may scorn the scorner, but He blamelessly may who is the Judge of all the earth. "Surely He scorneth the scorners," and in perfect holiness He does it. I. OUR OR WHAT SORT OF SOIL SPRINGS UP THIS WEED OF SCORN? And through what negligence of ours is it suffered to get its growth, choking the good seed, and spoiling the whole fruitage of the soul? One of the most frequent, certainly the most vulgar, of all the varieties of scorn, is that which associates itself with the possession of money. "Our soul," exclaims one of the psalmists sadly, as if speaking out of the depths of a bitter experience, "is filled with the scornful reproof of the wealthy." Those words date from a far past. It is some three thousand years since they were spoken, but probably they had as little of the air of novelty about them then as they have now. It is an old truth. But there is a sort of power antecedent even to the

money power, and perhaps for that reason I ought to have spoken of it first. I mean bodily superiority. Among savage races, where the struggle for survival is plainly seen to be everything, this tyranny of the stronger arm is, of course, more noticeable than in the midst of people called civilised. But the pride of life, yes, of downright animal life, is by no means a stranger even to enlightened society; as a hundred indications from the popular worship of the prize-fighter upwards, even as far as the councils of nations, amply testify. Along with strength of limb we reckon the advantage which those who are engaged in competition gain from a firm foothold, good standing-ground. Hence it happens that official station, high place, the holding of civil or military authority, has been known to engender scornfulness. And as with strength and power, so with beauty. Unsanctified beauty is proverbially scornful. In ancient times, the ill-made dwarf seems to have been given his place in kings' palaces for the very sake of heightening, by force of contrasts, the shapeliness of those among whom he crept and jested. The fact that graciousness of manner is always thought to add so great a charm to personal beauty testifies of itself to our not naturally expecting to find the two things combined. Imperiousness is commonly submitted to as one of the supposed prerogatives, or inherent rights of beauty. Nevertheless, it is written in a certain place, that "the Lord hateth a proud look." A consciousness of superior knowledge, or knowledge supposed to be superior, often carries with it the assumption of scorn. Thank God, the succession of lowly-minded scholars has never wholly failed since knowledge began to be. And yet the affectation of omniscience on the part of speakers and writers is far more frequent than could be wished. Learning patronises sanctity. Yet again, there is such a thing as spiritual scorn. Contempt for those held to be theologically or ecclesiastically below the mark, a certain pitiless disdain for the class whom St. Paul so tenderly speaks of, "the weak in the faith," has too often found utterance and illustration in the history of the people of God. So, then, these are the motive springs, the sources and the suggestions of scorn. II. **SOME OF THE BEST ACCREDITED REMEDIES FOR SCORN.** Do not understand me to intend methods of warding off from ourselves the scorn of others. The thing we really need to be told is how to seal up the fountain of scorn in our own hearts. 1. One of these remedies is to consider often and seriously the littleness, the real, the intrinsic smallness of the possession, gift, privilege, whichever it may be, upon which we are pluming ourselves, and from which we draw the justification of our scornful thoughts. Your wealth is tempting you to entertain a certain disdain for those less rich than yourself, is it? Consider what your riches really are. One of the English mystics speaks of his having found it an effectual mode of disabusing himself of the illusions of wealth to imagine all his property turned into some one form of merchandise, and then asking himself, How am I the better or the happier for being the legal owner of a hundred thousand pieces of such or such a mineral, or half a million boxes or two million bales of such or such a fabric? The device is perhaps a clumsy one, for in real life wealth seldom or never locks itself up in the monotonous and unattractive way supposed; at least, that is not the form in which we see it. Still the suggestion has something of value in it, for it does fasten the attention upon the coarse, material side of all accumulated riches, and does remind us how insignificant the thing called a fortune really is as compared with the earth and the fulness thereof. The mighty One who made and owns the world scorneth the scornors, and assuredly on this score of great possessions He has a right to do so. So much for the littleness of wealth at its greatest, but when we go on to take into account the transiency of it as well as the littleness, we see at once what an utterly groundless justification riches furnish for the exercise of scorn. Once separated from your property, and finding yourself all alone with your scorn, how very, very poorly off you will be! how very, very lonely! But if the case be thus with riches, is it any the better with bodily strength and personal beauty, the pride of power and the pride of intellect, and the pride of Churchly privilege? No, they are transient all. If riches have wings, so have they. 2. But there is a nobler, loftier thought than this, and one even more efficacious as a protection against the growth in us of the scornful mood, and that is the thought that all of these various possessions are given us in trust. If we can only rise to that conception of our life which acknowledges it to be, with all its powers and talents and privileges and opportunities, nothing less than a weighty trust committed to us by Almighty God, the Maker of our bodies and the Father of our spirits, if we can but do this, we shall be guarded alike from frivolity, from despondency, and from scorn. We cannot be frivolous, for no matter how swift the trust, we see the solemnity of it; we

cannot be despondent, for the responsibility laid on us is, by its very nature, prophetic of more than heart can wish or tongue utter; we cannot be scornful, for there is nothing in a lent possession that tends to foster the vanity of ownership. 3. But the best of all the antidotes to scorn is the contemplation, honest, earnest, and sustained, of the example of our Saviour Christ. If superiority of any kind whatsoever could confer the right to be contemptuous, surely that right was His. But what saith He of Himself, this King of kings? "I am meek," He says, "and lowly in heart." Yes, that is it; there lies the hiding of His power. There is no dash or touch or tinge of scorn to mar the perfect sweetness of His nature. Gracious He is, and clement, reassuring our timidity by the loving kindness of His smile, and through the pitifulness of His great mercy loosing those who are tied and bound by sin. If our religion means anything at all, means it not this, that a Christian's duty is the imitating of Christ? And are we imitators of Him, if knowingly we go on letting the scornful temper rule our hearts in place of pity? There is a hard, unloving mood of mind into which people sometimes allow themselves to fall as a sort of revenge upon their own ill success. Embittered by losses or failure, disappointed, hurt, they seem to find a certain ghastly consolation in noticing the like drawbacks in lives other than their own. But this is not to imitate Christ. He lost everything. "Then they all forsook Him and fled." And yet some of the gentlest, tenderest, most pitiful of His sayings are to be found among the words spoken from the Cross. In the family prayers of the late Dean Alford, himself an eminent exemplar of kindness and forbearance, there is a beautiful petition, which, if granted, would bring gladness into many a home to which now it is a stranger: "From forgetting or not caring for one another's infirmities," so the supplication runs, "good Lord, deliver us." The forgetting is the evil that comes from want of thought; the not caring, the evil that comes from want of heart; and how sore is our need of deliverance from both of them! (*W. R. Huntington, D.D.*)

He giveth grace unto the lowly.—
Of humility:—Pride and humility are two opposite habits or dispositions of the mind. There are two extremes, and between these the virtue of humility is placed. The two extremes are in the excess, which is pride, and in the defect, baseness of mind. Pride ariseth from an over-valuation of a man's self, or a want of a due sense of his dependency upon Almighty God. 1. It is a foolish thing for a man to be proud of the endowments of his mind. 2. Of bodily endowments. 3. Of things adventitious and foreign. The other extreme is baseness or sordidness of mind, which, though it carries the shadow of humility, is quite another thing. True humility is a lowly frame and habit of spirit arising from the due sense of the glorious excellency of the Almighty God and of our own frailties and infirmities. It is in itself the effect of a mind truly and soundly principled. It is evidenced by—1. A most awful and sincere reverence of the great and glorious God. 2. A most high and constant gratitude and thankfulness of heart and soul to Him. 3. The employment of all that God has given us to His glory and service. 4. A constant vigilance and attention of mind upon all our thoughts, words, and actions. 5. A sober opinion concerning ourselves, and all we do and say. 6. A diligent, and impartial, and frequent consideration, and examination, and animadversion of, and upon, our defects and failings. 7. Charitable opinions of the persons of others, as far as possibly may be.

I. THE FRUITS AND ADVANTAGES AND BENEFITS OF TRUE HUMILITY IN RELATION TO ALMIGHTY GOD. Two great advantages—1. He receives grace, favour, or honour from God. 2. He receives direction, guidance, and counsel from God.

II. THE ADVANTAGES OF TRUE HUMILITY IN RELATION TO THE HUMBLE MAN HIMSELF. 1. Humility keeps the soul in great evenness and tranquillity. 2. Gives contentment in any condition or station. 3. Gives patience under all adversity. 4. Gives great moderation and sobriety and vigilancy in the fullest enjoyment of temporal felicity. 5. Humility is an excellent remedy against the passion of fear.

III. THE ADVANTAGES OF HUMILITY IN RELATION TO OTHERS. These are of two kinds—1. The advantage the humble man doth to others. 2. The advantage which the humble man receives from others upon the account of his humility. Christ is the example of humility—(1) Because the instance and example of His humility was the most signal and wonderful of all His admirable virtues. (2) Because without humility to prepare and mellow the hearts of men it could not be morally possible for them to receive the faith of Christ. (3) Because without humility all the rest of those excellent virtues that were taught in the doctrine, and exhibited in the example of Christ, had been but unacceptable. Humility and lowliness of mind is the substratum and ground-

work, the necessary ingredients into all acceptable duties toward God and man. (*Sir M. Hale.*)

Ver. 35. The wise shall inherit glory.—Sanctified intellect :—I. ITS CHARACTER. Intelligence, mind, reason is that power by which the supremacy of man over the beasts of the earth is asserted. Whilst, other things being equal, the greatest minds have been Christian, the powers may be predicated of intellect, irrespective of the moral character of its possessor. But a great intellect dissociated from moral control may become a scourge and a terror. **II. THE WORK OF SANCTIFIED INTELLECT.** It is the glory of God. But this involves the good of man. There is no subject to which intelligence can devote itself but may be made to minister to both. How then shall we work? 1. By prayer. A devotional spirit is the first essential element of piety. 2. By the press. 3. By the pulpit. **III. THE REWARD OF SANCTIFIED INTELLECT.** It shall "inherit glory." (*William Leask.*) But shame shall be the promotion of fools.—*The folly of the earthly-minded :—I. IN THE CHOICE WHICH HE MAKES.* 1. The sinner prefers the favour of man to the favour of God. 2. He prefers the interests of the body to the interests of the soul. 3. He prefers temporal pleasure to eternal happiness; and in so doing, verily, he prefers the rags to the robes, the pebbles to the jewels, and the shadow to the substance. **II. IN THE CONDUCT WHICH HE PURSUES.** 1. He rebels against God his Maker, refusing to submit to His authority. 2. The sinner is going to an eternal world, and makes no preparation for that eternal world. 3. He is condemned; a pardon is freely offered by the Lord, and he rejects the offered pardon. **III. WHAT IS TO BE THE END OF THESE THINGS?** "Shame shall be the promotion of fools." This shame will arise from several sources. 1. From disappointment. Should a soldier be cashiered for cowardice, when he expected promotion for his supposed bravery; should an author be cried down, when he expected great applause; or should a person find that no mention is made of him in a will, when he expected to be one of the principal heirs; in all such cases disappointment would be a matter of shame. How much more when the sinner wakes up in eternity, and finds all his fond hopes of heaven blasted for ever! 2. From the full development of character which shall then be made. Some years since a certain man in one of our Atlantic cities was charged with a very base act—was charged with opening a letter which had been put into the post-office, and divulging some family secrets which that letter contained. He denied the charge. A committee was appointed to investigate the charge and make a report. I was present when the report was made. In the presence of some one or two hundred citizens, the chairman of the committee came forward and said, "We have investigated the charge alleged against the gentleman, and find it to be true." I saw the man the moment his character was thus blasted for ever. After one frantic effort with a pistol to take the life of the person who had thus exposed him, he dropped his head; he could not bear to look upon man or woman any more; and, returning to his lodgings, he laid himself down upon his bed, and died of a broken heart. Shame killed him. And now, if the divulging of one base act in such an assembly on earth occasioned him such overwhelming, heartbreaking shame, oh! what intolerable shame must come upon the sinner when every base act, when every impure thought, when every unlawful deed shall be revealed before God and angels and men! 3. From the manifestation of his folly. 4. From the company with which he will be obliged to associate. (*D. Baker, D.D.*)

CHAPTER IV.

VER. 1. The instruction of a father.—A religious home :—I. THE LOVE OF A RELIGIOUS HOME. Two kinds of love for the offspring. 1. The natural love. 2. The spiritual love, which has respect to the spiritual being, relations, and interests of the children. **II. THE TRAINING OF A RELIGIOUS HOME.** 1. The parent's teaching is worth retaining. 2. The parent's teaching is practical. 3. The parent's teaching is quickening to all the powers, intellectual and moral. **III. THE INFLUENCE OF A RELIGIOUS HOME.** 1. The susceptibility of childhood. 2. The force of parental affection. Religious homes are the great want of the race.

(David Thomas, D.D.) *Paternal exhortation*:—Doctrine and law form the staple of this appeal. By "law" understand "direction," for life is an ever-bisecting course, and full of points that must bewilder inexperienced travellers. Do not venture upon great sea voyages without proper instruments and without being taught how to use them. So in life. Be enriched with doctrine or wisdom, and cultivate that tender filial spirit which gratefully yields itself to direction. It is at once wise and lovely for youth to consult the aged, and to avail themselves of accumulated experience. Any other spirit is vain, self-conceited, frivolous, and unworthy. Why should the father be anxious to instruct and direct the son? Because he has seen more of life, more of its mystery, its peril, its tragedy; therefore his heart yearns to preserve the young from danger. The father's position is one of moral dignity and supreme benevolence. Having suffered himself, he would save his children from pain. (J. Parker, D.D.) *Attend to know understanding.*—

Knowing understanding:—I. YOUNG MEN HAVE NEED OFTEN TO BE CALLED UPON TO GET TRUE KNOWLEDGE. 1. Because of their own backwardness to the work. 2. The impediments and diversions from attaining true wisdom. 3. There are many things to be believed, beyond the power of corrupted reason to find out. 4. There are many practical things to be learned, else they can never be done. 5. There are many faculties of the soul to be reformed. 6. There are many senses and members of the body to be directed to many particular actions, and each to its own. Uses: 1. To blame young men that think their parents and teachers over-diligent. 2. To urge children to attend to their parents instructing them in piety. 3. To persuade parents and teachers not only to instruct, but also to incite to attention. II. EVERY YOUNG MAN HAS NEED TO BE CALLED ON TO LOOK AFTER TRUE KNOWLEDGE. 1. Because there is no disposition to this wisdom in the best by nature. 2. There is much averseness, because the principles of faith are above nature, and of practice against nature. (Francis Taylor, B.D.) *The invitation*:—I. LET OUR OWN CHILDREN RECEIVE INSTRUCTIONS. This charity must begin at home. II. LET ALL YOUNG PEOPLE TAKE PAINS TO GET KNOWLEDGE AND GRACE. They are in the learning stage. III. LET ALL WHO WOULD RECEIVE INSTRUCTION COME WITH THE DISPOSITION OF CHILDREN. Let prejudices be laid aside. Let them be dutiful, tractable, and self-diffident. (Matthew Henry.)

Vers. 3, 4. *For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother.*—*The religious education of Solomon*:—Solomon in these words gives us two pieces of his own private history, in order to account for the zeal he shows in this book for the welfare of the rising generation. The first is, that in early life he had a large share in the affections of his parents; and the second, that he received the first rudiments of that wisdom, for which he became afterwards so eminent, from their early instructions. The affection of his father David did not, by excessive indulgence, stand in the way of his education, as does the ill-regulated affection of many foolish parents, who cannot cross the inclination of their children, nor employ the authority to compel the attention of their light and unstable minds to what is for their lasting benefit. His mother, Bathsheba, took her share with her husband, David, in the delightful task of instructing young Solomon in the things of God. Of this Solomon says nothing in the text. Though he speaks of the affection of both his parents, he mentions only his father's care of his education. But in another passage of this book we find him referring to his mother's instructions, and styling them "the prophecy which his mother taught him." And it gives us a most comfortable proof of the genuine piety of both David and Bathsheba, and of the sincerity of their repentance for their grievous sin which they had committed. I. WHAT KIND OF EDUCATION DID SOLOMON'S PARENTS GIVE HIM WHEN HE WAS YOUNG? We cannot entertain a doubt that David would give his favourite son, to whom he looked as his successor on the throne, the best education which Israel, in his time, could afford. A man of talent and information himself, and possessed of the amplest means, he would certainly grudge no labour or expense to make him acquainted with whatever could serve to fit him for his future station in life. The schools of the prophets were for the instruction of the youth of Israel. Whatever value we may attach to other branches of education, and however important and useful instruction in those arts and sciences which serve the purposes of this present life may be supposed to be, the knowledge of the principles of religion is unquestionably far more valuable, important, and useful. For as the soul is more valuable than the body, and eternity than time, so the knowledge which fits us for spending life as becomes rational, immortal, and accountable creatures, and which,

through the blessing of God, may train us up for spending eternity in happiness and joy, must be inconceivably more valuable than what refers merely to this present vain and transitory world. We cannot, indeed, insure that our children, however carefully instructed in the fear of God, will profit by our care so as to serve God in their generation; but early instruction is the probable means of their future and eternal benefit—a means which God has enjoined parents to use, and which He has promised in ordinary cases to bless. Let the means be conscientiously employed, and let the fear that all may be unavailing rather excite to greater diligence than repress exertion, and to earnestness for the Divine blessing on the means of Divine appointment. II. IN WHAT MANNER DID THEY CONDUCT THE BUSINESS OF HIS RELIGIOUS EDUCATION? 1. They did not confide it entirely to others. There were good men about David's court, some of whom probably had a particular charge of Solomon's education, and in whom, as being prophets of God, David might have reposed the most entire confidence for ability and fidelity. But Solomon's parents do not seem to have considered this as exempting them from the obligation of the law of God to watch over their young charge themselves. They wished to see with their own eyes, and to hear with their own ears, the progress that he made, and to add their own diligence to that of his teachers, in order to promote his spiritual benefit. A king and queen taking so much pains for the religious instruction of their son is a pleasant sight, and must certainly silence and shame multitudes of persons in private life, who either neglect this duty altogether, or satisfy themselves entirely with the diligence of others, to whose care they entrust it. You have no time, you say. But will you not find time to die? and why should you so involve yourselves in the affairs of the world as not to have time for doing those things which are necessary for your dying well? If you have little leisure on working days, as perhaps many of you have, what deprives you of time on the first day of the week? 2. They adapted their instructions to his years. If we wish to be useful to the young our language must be plain and familiar; we must address ourselves to the imagination even more than to the judgment, must confine ourselves chiefly to first principles, and frequently repeat the same instructions, that they may take the firmer hold on the memory. 3. They instructed him in the most affectionate, serious, and winning manner. They showed by their manner that they felt the importance of the instructions they gave him, and that in the pains they took they were prompted by the sincerest love. Perhaps it is owing in some degree to a harshness and ungraciousness of manner employed by some pious parents, that so little advantage is gained by their children, from all the anxious pains taken on them; and perhaps, in other instances, to a want of due seriousness of manner when instruction is given. III. THE MOTIVES BY WHICH THEY WERE INDUCED TO DEVOTE THEIR ATTENTION TO THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF THEIR SON. 1. The warmth of their affection for their son. Did the affection of his pious and penitent parents, think you, expend itself in the endearments of parental fondness? in endeavours to gratify the passions of their darling child, and to anticipate, were it possible, every foolish and preposterous wish of his heart? Was it the only effect of it that they spoiled his temper by indulgence, and neglected his education by their aversion to cross his humour or subject him to necessary restraint? Such is the effect of the foolish fondness of many parents; they do their children the greatest injury by the injudicious manner in which they show their regard; they "doat too much," as saith the poet, "and spoil what they admire." Not so the parents of Solomon. Love to their son excited them to labour for his welfare. And what does a good man or woman consider as best for their children? Doubtless what they consider as best for themselves—the knowledge of God, the fear of God, the enjoyment of God. When parents neglect the religious education of their children, I can account for their negligence only in one of two ways—either they do not really love their children, or they do not themselves believe the truth and necessity of religion. The first I am reluctant to admit; for bad as the world is, the instances of parents who do not love their children are few, and natural affection shows itself, not unfrequently, very strong in the conduct of the most abandoned of men. To be "without natural affection" is to be worse even than the brutes. I will not say, then, that those parents who do not educate their children in the fear of God are destitute of natural affection: the truth is, that they do not really believe the religion which they profess; for did they believe it, they love their children so well that they would use every conceivable means within their power to make them acquainted with it, and so put them in possession of its inestimable advantages. Did you believe the gospel yourselves, you could not indolently look

on and see your beloved children perish. You would "travail in birth till Christ were formed in their hearts." You would, like the parents of Solomon, teach your children, while they are yet young, "the things which belong to their peace."

2. The example of their godly ancestors excited them to educate their child in the fear of God. And why should not we also follow the commendable practices of our godly forefathers? We are sufficiently prone to follow customs which we have "received by tradition from our fathers," which, perhaps, can scarcely be justified; and must it not much more be our wisdom and honour to imitate them in what is so praiseworthy? What evidence do we give that we belong to the family of God, if the customs and manners of the family are not adopted by us—if, instead of "bringing up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," that they may be "a seed which shall serve Him, that shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation," we shall suffer them to continue ignorant of the first principles of religion, and a ready prey to every temptation?

3. The positive injunction of the law of God, though last mentioned, must have been first in its force on the conscience of Solomon's parents, exciting them to see to his religious education. And this law is still obligatory. It is not one of those things peculiar to the old dispensation, which have passed away, but part of that law by which we are bound, under the dispensation of the gospel. Our obligation to attend to the religious education of our offspring is inseparable from our relation to them as our children. When God gives a person the blessing of children, He unites duty with privilege, the duty of educating them for God with the privilege of enjoying them as His gift.

IV. THE USE WHICH SOLOMON MADE OF HIS PARENTS' INSTRUCTIONS. Here I can only remark, in general, that it appears, from the text, that he had profited by them. His parents, who had instructed him with such pious care in his youth, at least his father David, were many years dead before he wrote this book; but we find that, at the time he wrote it, they still lived in his affectionate remembrance of them and their pious care; and, in token of this, he quotes some of their early instructions, and, in imitation of them, enforces on his son attention to the same duties. And good reason had he to cherish a grateful recollection of them; for, in thus training him, they had done him the greatest kindness—a kindness for which he could never repay them, and which it would have been the highest ingratitude if he should ever have forgotten. (*James Peddie, D.D.*) **Let thine heart retain my words.**—*Education: the child's thought of the parent*:—This chapter begins with a charming little piece of autobiography. The grateful memories of a father's teaching and of a mother's tenderness give point and force to the exhortations.

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF EARLY IMPRESSIONS. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the permanent effects of those first tendencies impressed on the soul before the intellect is developed, and while the soft, plastic nature of the child is not yet determined in any particular direction. We learn to love, not because we are taught to love, but by some contagious influence of example, or by some indescribable attraction of beauty. Our first love to religion is won from us by living with those that love her. The affections are elicited, and often permanently fixed, before the understanding has come into play. The first thing is to give our children an atmosphere to grow up in; to cultivate their affections, and set their hearts on things eternal; to make them associate the ideas of wealth and honour, of beauty and glory, not with material possessions, but with the treasures and rewards of wisdom.

II. WHAT IS TO BE THE DEFINITE TEACHING OF THE CHILD? The first object in the home life is to enable children to realise what salvation is, as an inward state, resulting from a spiritual change. We are tempted in dealing with children to train them only in outward habits, and to forget the inward sources which are always gathering and forming; hence we often teach them to avoid the lie on the tongue, and yet we leave them with the lies in the soul, the deep inward untruths which are their ruin. We bring them up as respectable and decorous members of society, and yet leave them a prey to secret sins; they are tormented by covetousness, which is idolatry, by impurity, and by all kinds of envious and malignant passions. The second thing to be explained and enforced is singleness of heart, directness and consistency of aim, by which alone the inward life can be shaped to virtuous ends. The right life is a steady progress undiverted by the alluring sights and sounds which appeal to the senses. Here, in the passage, is a great contrast between those whose early training has been vicious or neglected, and those who have been "taught in the way of wisdom, led in paths of uprightness." It is a contrast which should constantly be present to the eyes of parents with a warning and an encouragement. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. **Wisdom is the principal thing.**—*The principal thing*:—I. IF WE CONSIDER MAN'S SPIRITUAL STATE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD. II. IF WE CONSIDER MAN'S PRESENT HAPPINESS. The true happiness of man has its foundation in wisdom. I go on the supposition of Christ that a "man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesseth." Happiness depends on the state of the mind. It is religion only which enlightens the understanding, which influences the heart, and which brings into the favour of high heaven. Man cannot be happy, because he is subject to passions and tempers which perplex and disturb him. 1. Religion brings us into a state of mind which is calculated to make us happy. 2. It gives a blessing to all around, and inspires contentment in every state. III. IF WE CONSIDER THE IMPERISHABLE NATURE OF THIS BLESSING. True religion accompanies us in life; it lives with us in death; it goes with us into eternity. IV. IF WE CONSIDER ITS SOVEREIGN AND PECULIAR INFLUENCE IN IMPROVING THE WORLD. This true wisdom shall one day produce such a change that heaven shall come down to earth and dwell among men. (*J. Stewart.*)

The "summum bonum":—A modern author says the "chief good must unite the following qualities: It must be intellectual, or adapted to the higher and nobler part of our nature; attainable by all, of whatever sex, age, or mental conformation; unimpaired by distribution; independent of the circumstances of time or place; incapable of participation to excess; composed essentially of the same elements as the good to be enjoyed in a future state."

I. "SUMMUM BONUM" DESCRIBED. 1. Consists in the possession of the highest knowledge. 2. In the application of the highest knowledge. II. "SUMMUM BONUM" SOUGHT. 1. Attentively. 2. Constantly. 3. Lovingly. 4. Supremely. III. "SUMMUM BONUM" ENJOYED. It will be three things to us. 1. A guardian. 2. A patron. 3. A rewarder. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

The principal thing:—I. WHAT THIS WISDOM IS. Sometimes the word refers to our blessed Lord Himself. It also means that religion of which the Lord Jesus Christ is the sum and substance. 1. He is a wise man who knows himself. Till a man knows God he knows not himself. God is, in that sense, a glass, in which a man sees himself, and the nearer he comes to that glass the more he discerns himself. A man knows himself when, as a law-condemned sinner, as a sin-condemned sinner, and as a self-condemned sinner, he stands before the eye of God. Then there is self-acquaintance—not till then. He now reads the hardest book in the world. There is no book so hard as the book of a man's own heart. 2. He is a wise man who draws near to God in Christ. He is a wise man who, under a sentence of condemnation as in himself deserved, can in Christ know how to meet the holy Lord God with humble confidence. 3. He is a wise man who, in the midst of the crookedness of this world, is led to walk straightly with God. 4. He is a wise man who knows how to meet the trials of life. II. WHY IS THIS WISDOM CALLED THE PRINCIPAL THING? That is the principal thing which is the only abiding thing. True wisdom, like its source, is perennial, unchanging, everlasting. And it is the only satisfying thing. It comes from God; it leads to God. It comes from above; it leads to above. It is a principle of immortality, and it trains the soul and educates it for immortality. III. THE EXHORTATION, "GET WISDOM." Get it; then it is to be got. It is to be got in the way of seeking. For a man to feel his lack of wisdom is the beginning of wisdom.

1. Do not mistake a counterfeit for wisdom. 2. Avoid first declensions. 3. Make a conscience of secret prayer. 4. Avoid dangerous associations. 5. Take heed as to your books. 6. Study to show religion at home as well as abroad. 7. Live upon Christ. As your soul is under the constraint of His love it weakens the world, it makes sin hateful, it raises above self, it purifies the motives, and brings a man to walk nearly, closely with God. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Divine wisdom:—Divine wisdom only deserves the name of wisdom. 1. Because it converseth in the highest things. 2. Because it seeks to approve itself to God. 3. Because it is both the mother and guide, or chariot-driver, of all virtue, and guides it aright. 4. It is the greatest gift God ever gave man, for it directs him to Jesus Christ, the wisdom of the Father, without whom is no salvation, and therefore no true nor lasting gain by any other wisdom. Use: To reprove such as boast much of human sciences, but make no account of heavenly wisdom. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Grace is wisdom, and wisdom is the principal thing:—I. THE COMMENDATION OF WISDOM. By wisdom is meant Christ the Wisdom of God; and grace, which is the only wisdom in a man. This can be shown in two ways. 1. The Lord counts nothing wisdom but godliness, and this He doth everywhere style "wisdom." 2. In God's account all things are folly without grace. The heathen were the greatest artists and philosophers of the world, those that most inquired into the

secrets of nature, as in Athens and Corinth, which were universities and places far more famous than any other for knowledge, tongues, and all abilities. Take the greatest statist and politician in the world, which hath also a great show and name for wisdom. Let him be without a principle of grace, and his own policies will prove his own snare. Take the greatest men in the world, and they are wise in their own conceits, yet is their life a vanity. Wisdom acts by the highest principles. According to a man's principles are the rules of his actions. These are some of the high and excellent principles that godliness lays in the soul.

(a) That the chief beauty of the creature is holiness. (b) The happiness of the creature consists in communion with God. (c) Sin is the greatest evil in the world. (d) It is better to suffer than to sin. (e) Things seen are but temporal. II. AN EXHORTATION TO GET THIS WISDOM. 1. The excellency of grace lies in a conformity unto God. 2. From this conformity there ariseth a communion. 3. Grace fits a man for the service of God. 4. Grace turns all that a godly man enjoyeth into a blessing. 5. Grace fills the soul with all spiritual excellences. 6. Grace will preserve a man from all evil. (*William Strong.*)

*The principal thing:—*Wealth, power, ease, pleasure, intellectual greatness are thought by different persons to be the principal thing. God says, "Wisdom is the principal thing." I. IN WHAT DOES TRUE RELIGION CONSIST? It embraces three things—regeneration, justification, and sanctification; and secures a fourth—glorification. Regeneration is a change of heart; justification a change of state; sanctification a change of character; glorification is the union and consummation of all other changes. II. **WHAT IS TRUE RELIGION THE PRINCIPAL THING?** 1. Because it more exalts our nature and character than anything else can possibly do. 2. It puts man in possession of more solid and lasting enjoyment than anything else possibly can. 3. It provides for the whole scope of man's being, for soul and body, for time and eternity, for earth and heaven. III. THE APPLICATIONS OF THE SUBJECT. Get true religion—by forsaking everything previously sought as the principal thing; by repenting of the past, by coming to Christ in faith and prayer, by seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit; by imbuing the mind with gospel truths, submitting to its doctrines and precepts, and conforming the character to all its requirements. How great the happiness of those who have true religion! (*Essex Remembrancer.*)

*Religion is wisdom:—*Mankind is constantly in search after happiness; they seek it in various ways of their own contrivance. I. TRUE RELIGION IS THE SOUNDEST WISDOM. Real religion, when it takes possession of the human bosom, always produces in its possessor a true concern for his everlasting salvation. II. THIS WISDOM IS THE "PRINCIPAL THING," AND THEREFORE WORTHY OF OUR EARNEST PURSUIT. If a man consult his own safety and happiness he will seek it in religion. Our safety and security are only in God. Religion opens to us enjoyments not to be found elsewhere. Religion adds to every man's relative usefulness. Only that usefulness which springs from religious principles will be lasting. Religion will be found to be "the principal thing" at the hour of death and at the day of judgment. (*George Clayton.*)

*Religion man's only wisdom:—*I. THE OBJECT THAT IS SET BEFORE US. We are to pursue "wisdom" and "understanding." These words relate to that state of the human mind, when it is brought to apprehend Divine truths, and to apply those truths to the course of human action. A wise man is one who has gained, and who has taken home to his heart, the knowledge essential to the right guidance of his steps towards heaven. A man of understanding is one whose mind has been enlightened to a clear perception of right and wrong, and who has within him those just and holy principles of the law of God which lead him to pursue the good and to avoid the evil. The object pointed out to you is, the application of the science of religion to man in his present state, leading him to the discharge of duties which he owes to God, himself, and his fellow-creatures. There is no motive like a religious motive to insure the performance of a right action. There is no law equal to the law of God as a guide to what is good, and a check to what is evil. When this law reaches the heart, and becomes the governing principle of a man's conduct, it produces effects which you will look for in vain from the purest precepts of mere morality. Knowledge enlightens a man, and so great is its influence in this way, that many at the present day are actually making it the object of idolatry. We must not mistake the character of knowledge, or overrate her influence. She does much for a nation to civilise and polish it, but she does not teach us our duty to God, nor lead us to practise it. What is human knowledge compared with the knowledge of religion? Our main object through life should be to acquaint ourselves with the things of God, and to gain for our minds

that Divine illumination that shall enable us to pass in safety through the varied temptations of the present world, and to reach the happiness of the next. II. THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF THIS HEAVENLY WISDOM. The hearts of the fallen race of Adam are naturally fond of sensible objects. We are like little children, pleased with trifles; baubles amuse us; when, as beings destined for eternity, we ought to be contemplating heaven's august realities. What have the men who have been most given to the things of the world gained even here by this earthliness? Surely, nothing that deserves the name of satisfaction. The possession of religion more than makes amends for whatever losses, or trials, or anxieties, we may experience in obtaining it. Religion is so incalculably important that we cannot estimate its value. It is "profitable unto all things." III. THE DILIGENCE WITH WHICH WE SHOULD APPLY OURSELVES TO THE ATTAINMENT OF IT. (*William Curling, M.A.*) *The worth of wisdom*.—I. ITS SACRED NATURE. Even in the ordinary concerns of life we feel the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Wisdom is not limited to prudence in relation to the ordinary concerns of this life. Nor does it consist in science, however exalted its flight; nor in philosophy, however ennobling the vantage-ground on which it stands. Wisdom is the fear of God, the knowledge of God, the love of God, a right state of heart before God. The wisdom proper for man as a fallen being concerns the questions how he may obtain the favour of God, escape the punishment due to sin, obtain glory, honour, and immortality. Wisdom is connected with salvation. II. ITS SUPREME IMPORTANCE. 1. Its superiority above all other objects to which you can possibly direct your attention. Pleasure is a great attraction to the youthful mind, but happiness is often sought where it is not to be found. That alone deserves the name of happiness which will bear reflection. Wisdom, thought of as religion, is superior to fame, or wealth, or knowledge. 2. Its beneficial effects should be considered. Observe the character thus formed; its influence on conduct and practice, and its relation to the future. III. THE SCRIPTURAL METHOD OF OBTAINING TRUE WISDOM. 1. There must be a deep conviction of the necessity of this wisdom. 2. A diligent study of God's Word. 3. Fervent and habitual prayer. 4. A believing application to Jesus Christ. 5. Habitual retirement for meditation. 6. Practical carrying out of good principles in all the relations of life. (*J. Fletcher, M.A.*) *Therefore get wisdom*.—The desire of knowledge is common to all human kind. All knowledge is worth the having, but far more desirable, and infinitely above all, is the knowledge of spiritual things. To this is given the name Wisdom. I. IT IS POSSIBLE TO GET WISDOM. We are living in an age of weak convictions, of guesses as distinguished from beliefs, of opinions rather than established views. The most popular phase of thought in these times is known as Agnosticism. The original agnostic was Pyrrho of Elis. He was the universal sceptic, whose philosophy was merely an interrogation point. But it is possible to know respecting spiritual things. We have the faculty wherewith to apprehend them. This faculty or spiritual sense is the link binding us to God. We have it as a Divine inheritance; it belongs to us by reason of our Divine birth. We are environed by spiritual facts. I do not say that we can exhaust all or any spiritual truth. II. IT IS OUR MAGNIFICENT PRIVILEGE AND PREROGATIVE TO INFORM OURSELVES CONCERNING SPIRITUAL THINGS. We are Divine and immortal. In reaching out for spiritual truth we give distinct evidence of our descent from God. The lowest attitude which men can assume towards truth is that of credulity. A step higher and we reach the doubters. Doubt is nobler than credulity. A sceptic is a better man than an unthinking bigot. But the sceptic is not a learned man, for true learning implies conviction. He is a half-educated man, and a little learning is ever a dangerous thing. Doubt is always something to move away from. There are two kinds of doubt as there are two twilights. The higher thing is belief. Faith is substance resting on evidence; the substance of spiritual things resting on evidence which appeals to the moral sense. The character of any man is measured by his creed. III. IT IS OUR BOUNDEN DUTY, THEREFORE, TO HAVE SOUND CONVICTIONS AS TO SPIRITUAL TRUTH. We have no right to allow the great problems to go by default. If there is a God it behoves us to know it. How shall we get wisdom? (*Jas. i. 5*). God is light; open the windows, and let God shine in. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Bow down at the mercy-seat and ask God to illuminate the dark chambers of your soul. Get wisdom from God. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *The attainment of true wisdom*.—I. SHOW THE NATURE OF WISDOM, WHAT IT IS, AND WHEREIN IT CONSISTS. 1. The description of its nature and causes. Aristotle calls it that intellectual virtue whereby we are directed in our manners and carriage, to

make choice of the right means in the prosecution of our true end. Tully describes it as *ars vivendi*. Aquinas as the skill of demeaning a man's self aright in practical affairs. In chap. xiv. 8, we read, "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way." The philosophers call four of the virtues "cardinal," because all the rest turn upon them as upon their hinges. These are prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Prudence, or wisdom, consists of three parts. A sagacity of judgment to make a true estimate of things, persons, times, and events. A presence of mind to obviate sudden accidents, to meet every emergency. Experience and observation of the most usual and probable consequences of things.

2. The several kinds and distinctions of it. One is a grace, or virtue, the other is not. There is a wisdom that cometh from above. There is a wisdom which is from beneath, earthly, sensual, devilish. There is a distinction in wisdom according to the several ends which men propose to themselves and the means whereby these several ends are to be attained; the gratifying of carnal appetite; peace and contentment of mind; or spiritual blessedness. So wisdom may be carnal policy, moral prudence, or spiritual wisdom. 3. The proper effects of wisdom. It directs to the right end, such as may be perfective of our natures. It directs to consult about the means, which must be fit and accommodate to the end, and must be honest and lawful in themselves. Two things every man should propose to himself in the management of his affairs, success and safety: in order to which he must observe four conditions—forecast and providence against want; wariness and caution against danger; order and union against opposition; sedulity and diligence against difficulties. These four seem to be recommended in chap. xxx. 24, where four living creatures are spoken of as being "exceeding wise," the ants, conies (or mice), locusts, and the spider. 4. The opposite to this virtue of wisdom, by way of excess is craft, by way of defect is folly.

II. THE NECESSITY OF WISDOM, OR THE GROUNDS OF OUR OBLIGATION TO IT. Scripture gives both precepts concerning it (such as Col. iv. 5; Eph. v. 15); and commendations of it (as Job xxviii. 16). It is better than riches. It is itself the greatest honour, and will be a means to advance a man in the esteem of others. It is the truest and best pleasure. It is as our life. It is necessary to the safety of our persons; and to the management of our affairs with success. Objection: Is not wisdom a gift and privilege, rather than a duty? Answer: 1. Christian wisdom, for the nature and substance of it is a duty, for the degrees a gift. 2. Moral or civil prudence is also a duty. The neglect of such abilities as are suitable to a man's station is not only a defect but a fault. Three inferences: 1. No wicked man can be truly wise. 2. Grace and holiness are the truest wisdom. 3. If wisdom be the principal thing, then let it be our principal endeavour to attain it. (*Bp. John Wilkins.*)

The best treasure:—The figure of merchandise is still maintained. Work, plan, seek, toil, are the watchwords of true zeal in this matter. It is as if the youth were face to face with many attractions—say, beauty, wealth, ease, pleasure, and the like—and whilst he is estimating their claims the father exhorts him, saying, "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not be deceived; insist upon having the brightest treasure, and on no account be victimised by men who would urge you to sacrifice future satisfaction to immediate gratification." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The best thing to get:—Wisdom is of incomparable value, as it enables us to turn every other good to a right use. I. THE TRUE NATURE OF WISDOM. 1. Wisdom is not synonymous with knowledge. 2. Wisdom is not merely the equivalent of prudence in relation to the ordinary concerns of life. 3. Wisdom is not identical with philosophy. 4. Wisdom consists in reverence of the Divine, in the knowledge of God, and a right state of the heart in relation to God. It is, in a word, religion. It is the choice of the highest end, pursued by the best means. It consists in discharging aright those obligations which we owe to our glorious Creator. II. THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF WISDOM. 1. Remark its superiority to all other objects of human regard. True wisdom sought and won and worn appeases the hunger and thirst of the soul. 2. The beneficial results of gaining wisdom. Formation of virtuous and Christian character. Avoidance of evil. Eternal gain. III. THE PROPER MEANS OF OBTAINING WISDOM. (*W. E. Daly, B.A.*)

Application to wisdom and learning recommended and enforced:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY WISDOM? Cicero calls wisdom the knowledge of things Divine and human, and of their efficient causes. II. WISDOM IS THE GUIDE TO VIRTUE. Virtue is the right discharge of our duty in every station of life. Virtue contains the whole art of right and happy living. Did learning afford no assistance to virtue; were pleasure the only benefit arising from

study; it must on every account be allowed to be an amusement of the noblest kind, and every way best suited to the nature of man. He is most likely to prosper in this life whose mind is best cultivated and enlarged with the truest notions of things, and who joins to that cultivated understanding a corresponding practice, not less excelling in virtue than in knowledge. Honour, too, is a general attendant upon wisdom. Moreover, the love of wisdom and the practice of virtue, will tend above all things to lengthen our present existence. 1. God, the great Father of the world, has created you a reasonable being, and endowed you with faculties. The duty lies on you to improve and enlarge them. 2. Your parents on earth do everything to help you in getting wisdom. 3. Society has a claim upon you. Then cultivate liberal science as the handmaid of sublimer knowledge. Moral virtue and the improvement of the heart are graces which give to science its lustre, and to life its worth. They expand and enlarge the soul. Cultivate liberal science under the sanction and guidance of religion. (*W. Dodd, LL.D.*) *The excellency of wisdom*.—I. AN ENCOMIUM OF WISDOM. She is commended to us as the most excellent of all things. She holds the principality amongst those virtues that ennoble, enrich, and adorn the mind of man. II. AN EARNEST PERSUASION, backed with arguments, to endeavour the acquisition and improvement of this excellent virtue. Wisdom is an excellent, energetic virtue of the mind of man, whereby, upon a clear apprehension and right judgment of things, the whole soul is carried out, in a well-governed order, in an earnest and constant pursuit of the most excellent attainments. There is a threefold act of wisdom. 1. To propose the most excellent end. 2. To elect the best means. 3. To engage the most earnest endeavours in the diligent use of these means. III. WHEREIN DOES THE EXCELLENCY OF WISDOM LIE? IV. THIS EXCELLENCY IS ATTAINABLE. It cannot be commended in vain. Man's work in the world cannot be done without wisdom. God has given man a rational soul. Wisdom may be attained by—1. A due government of man's self. 2. A serious consideration of a man's state. 3. A diligent study of the Holy Scriptures. (*Thomas Willis, D.D.*) *The wisdom and importance of religion*.—1. Religion is the principal thing, as it is the care of our principal part—our rational and immortal nature. 2. Wisdom is the principal thing, for this secures our principal interest. 3. Wisdom is the principal thing, as this comprises everything that is amiable, virtuous and excellent. 4. Religious wisdom is the principal thing, because, while it secures our main interest, it promotes all our subordinate interests. 5. This heavenly wisdom is the principal thing, for without it worldly wisdom will do us no good. 6. Religious wisdom is the principal thing, as it is of universal importance. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*) *Religion and virtue a sovereign good*.—1. Widely different are the effects of moral good which is the object of religion. The contemplation of an infinite Being, the study of His astonishing works and dispensations, are objects which will afford unceasing employment and satisfaction for the most exalted faculties of the sublimest genius. The constant progressive improvement of the soul in virtue and happiness, and the continual approaches to the perfection of its nature, are ends worthy the existence not only of man, but even of the highest angel. 2. Another condition requisite to constitute the sovereign good is, that it be conducive to our well being. Happiness is not made up of transient raptures. It consists in the enjoyment of permanent serenity and calm satisfaction. Of such felicity what can afford a fairer prospect than a virtuous and religious disposition? This tends to preserve the desires and passions within due subjection, to prevent them from inflaming the imagination and biasing the judgment. Such a disposition enables us to view objects in their true and proper colours, unadorned with fictitious and delusive attractions. 3. The third quality requisite to constitute the sovereign good is, that it should be suitable to all times, places, and conditions of life. Even when flesh and heart fail, when the world, with all its attractions, can no longer amuse, then will the consolations of religion and virtue still support us, and shed beams of comfort and hope to dispel the dreary shades of the dark vale of death. 4. A fourth condition implied in our idea of the sovereign good is, that it should be durable and inadmissible. The satisfactions of religion and virtue, being derived from God, are permanent and unchangeable as the source from whence they spring. Not even death, which tears us from every sublunary pleasure, can destroy these satisfactions. (*B. C. Sowden.*) *Wisdom (a sermon to the young)*.—I. WHAT THAT WISDOM IS WHICH IS HERE SO EARNESTLY RECOMMENDED. It is twofold, viz., speculative and practical, or wisdom of mind and wisdom of conduct. Speculative wisdom, or wisdom of mind, consists in the knowledge of our true happiness and the way to it. Practical

wisdom, or wisdom of conduct, consists in the steady pursuit of it in the right way.

II. How IT IS THE PRINCIPAL THING. It is that which ought in the first and principal place to be minded, secured, and preferred before everything else; the one thing needful, in comparison of which everything else has but a very inconsiderable importance. 1. Though wisdom, as now explained, be the principal thing, it is not the only thing that deserves our regard. The very term "principal thing" implies that there are other things of a subordinate consideration that ought to be minded in a proper degree. The affairs of the present life claim some of our thoughts and time. 2. Wisdom is the principal thing, so the importance of every other thing is to be measured by its connection with, or relation to it. III. How WISDOM IS TO BE ATTAINED. 1. Accustom yourselves to a habit of thinking on the best things. Wisdom begins with consideration, the want of which is the source of universal folly. 2. Would you be wise, let me beseech you to consider the importance of improving the opportunities and advantages of your present education. 3. Would you be wise indeed, you must carefully inform yourselves of the will of God and every branch of your duty from the sacred Scriptures. 4. Would you be truly wise, you must not only take care to furnish your minds with a knowledge of the Christian principles in general, but of those duties and principles in particular which will best adorn that character and station wherein you may hereafter appear in the world. 5. In order to be truly wise, you must take care to know yourselves; and particularly your constitutional sins. 6. Cultivate a sense of your constant dependence on God for everything, and acknowledge that dependence daily. 7. Think often of death. 8. Earnestly pray to God to make you wise. (*John Mason, M.A.*)

Ver. 8. **Exalt her, and she shall promote thee.**—*Man and religion mutually exalted*:—True wisdom includes two things—first, the choice of the highest possible good; secondly, the adoption of the best possible means for the attainment of that good. I. **MAN EXALTING RELIGION.** There is a sense in which it may be said that man cannot exalt religion. But—1. **Man may exalt it into his heart as a supreme passion.** Abounding around us are organisations which have for their object the reformation of morals, the correcting or suppressing certain evil habits, social and national. But mere external reformation without inward renewal will leave the man lost and perishing. When man proposes to improve the condition of humanity he begins outside, whereas God always begins inside. Man works from circumference to centre, God works from centre to circumference. You must place religion on the throne of your heart, give her supremacy, and the effect will be seen in the temper, conversation, and life. 2. **Man may exalt it into his will as the all-controlling force, the life-principle.** Tell me what the ruling force in the man is and I will tell you his character. All intelligent beings in the universe are under the dominion of either selfishness or benevolence. There is no sin apart from selfishness; there is no virtue apart from benevolence. When Christ takes possession of the heart the usurper is overthrown. Sin is no longer in the ascendancy, Christ becomes king; but although the power, the supremacy, of sin is broken, evil in a subordinate state may exist within. Christ can also expel His rivals. 3. **Man may exalt it in his practice by living its lofty precepts.** Christianity is not a creed, it is a life. The morals of Christianity are the purest the world has ever known, our enemies being judges. We want "living epistles," men and women sanctified to God, embodying in their daily life and conversation the lofty precepts of the New Testament. II. **CHRISTIANITY EXALTING MAN.** 1. It will promote your honour. Men everywhere yearn for a twofold immortality—the immortality of the life in the world beyond, and the immortality of posthumous fame in this world. Men have obtained honour in other ways than by religion. But where is the man who will match for honour the men of "faith" mentioned in Hebrews xi.? 2. It will promote your happiness. One of the strongest instincts of the human soul is the instinct for happiness. All men covet it. In order to gain this coveted prize man must be brought into harmony with himself. Man is a being of strange contrarities. Within him are forces of evil which drive him into wrong courses; there is also a power of conscience which meets him in these evil ways, denounces, condemns, and punishes him. You cannot secure peace by forgetting the past. In order to peace and contentment you must be in harmony with your surroundings. 3. Religion will promote your prospects. It supplies man with blessed hopes, cheerful prospects, and a glorious future. (*R. Roberts.*) *Wisdom's bargain*:—I. **EXALT WISDOM.** 1. By entertaining lofty thoughts about her. 2. By making

earnest efforts to obtain her. 3. By giving her the highest place in our affections. 4. By placing her upon the seat of government within the soul. 5. By helping her to reach her throne of universal dominion. II. WISDOM SHALL PROMOTE THEE—1. To the favour and fellowship of God on earth. 2. To a place of safety and comfort among the trials and dangers of life. 3. To a position of usefulness and honour amongst men. 4. To a throne of glory in the skies. (*T. Whitelaw, M.A.*) She shall bring thee to honour.—*The true honour of man* :—The love of honour is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live. Among the advantages which attend religion and virtue, the honour which they confer on man is frequently mentioned in Scripture. By the true honour of man is to be understood, not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart, what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species. From what cause does this eminence arise? 1. Not from riches. 2. Not from rank or office. 3. Not from splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. 4. Not in reputation derived from civil accomplishments. 5. Not from any adventitious circumstances of fortune. We must look to the mind and the soul. The honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent and more complete than what can be acquired by any other means. The universal consent of mankind in honouring real virtue is sufficient to show what the genuine sense of human nature is on this subject. The honour acquired by religion and virtue is honour Divine and immortal. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*)

Vers. 10, 11. I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.—*Precept and example* :—Teaching and leading are closely allied, but are not identical. It is possible and common to have the first in large measure where the second is wanting. It is easier to tell another the right way than to walk in it yourself. Only a godly man can bring up his child for God. Many will do evil; few dare to teach it to their own offspring. This is the unwilling homage which the evil are constrained to pay to goodness. Great is the effect when parents consistently and steadfastly go before their children, giving them a daily example of their daily precepts. An example of some kind parents must exhibit in their families. If it be not such as to help, it will certainly hinder the education of the young. God in the providential laws permits no neutrality in the family. There you must either be for or against Him. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The true parental aim* :—What is the prime object we should seek for our children? It is to have them fixed and established in ways of wisdom and right paths. What are the means of securing this object? It is teaching them and leading them. This father had trained his son in character for wisdom and righteousness. Some fathers are only concerned for the physical wants of their households. Others are most concerned for the intellectual culture of their children. Yet others look chiefly after traits of character. The true aim of parents should be the culture of a God-fearing, God-obeying, God-loving character. In the world there is a woeful lack of character. Then—1. Teach children right views of life. 2. Teach children right habits. You lead them into right paths—(1) By your example. (2) By prayer. (3) By keeping them under the influence of the sanctuary. (*W. F. V. Bartlett, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.—*Monotony and crises* :—The old metaphor likening life to a path has many felicities in it. It suggests constant change, it suggests continuous progress in one direction, and that all our days are linked together, and are not isolated fragments; and it suggests an aim and an end. "When thou goest"—that is, the monotonous tramp, tramp, tramp, of slow walking, along the path of an uneventful daily life, the humdrum "one foot up and another foot down" which makes the most of our days. "When thou runnest"—that points to the crises, the sudden spurts, the necessarily brief bursts of more than usual energy and effort and difficulty. And about both of them, the humdrum and the exciting, the monotonous and the startling, the promise comes that if we walk in the path of wisdom we shall not get disgusted with the one and we shall not be overwhelmed by the other. But before I deal with these two clauses specifically, let me recall to you the condition, and the sole condition, upon which either of them can be fulfilled in our daily lives. "The path of Wisdom" assumes a heightened meaning, for it is the path of the personal Wisdom.

the Incarnate Wisdom, Christ Himself. And what does it then come to be, to obey this command? Let the Christ who is not only wise, but Wisdom, choose your path, and be sure that by the submission of your will all your paths are His, and not only yours. Make His path yours by following in His steps. Keep company with Him on the road. You will say, "Leave me not alone, and let me cling to Thee on the road, as a little child holds on by her mother's skirt or her father's hand," then, and only then, will you walk in the path of wisdom. Now, then, these three things—submission of will, conformity of conduct, closeness of companionship—these three things being understood, let us look for a moment at the blessings that this text promises, and first at the promise for long, uneventful stretches of our daily life. Perhaps nine-tenths at least of all our days and years fall under the terms of this first promise, "When thou walkest." For many miles there comes nothing particular, nothing at all exciting, nothing new, nothing to break the plod, plod, plod along the road. Everything is as it was yesterday, and the day before that, and as it will be to-morrow, and the day after that, in all probability. Now, then, if Jesus Christ is not to help us in the monotony of our daily lives, what, in the name of common sense, is His help good for? Unless the trivial is His field, there is very little field for Him, in your life or mine. We all know the sense of disgust that comes over us at times, and of utter weariness, just because we have been doing the same things day after day for so long. I know only one infallible way of preventing the common from becoming commonplace, of preventing the small from becoming trivial, of preventing the familiar from becoming contemptible, and it is to link it all to Jesus Christ, and to say, "for Thy sake, and unto Thee, I do this"; then, not only will the rough places become plain, and the crooked things straight, and not only will the mountains be brought low, but the valleys of the commonplace will be exalted. "Thy steps shall not be straitened." Walk in the path of Christ, with Christ, towards Christ, and "thy steps shall not be straitened." Now, there is another aspect of this same promise—viz., if we thus are in the path of Incarnate Wisdom, we shall not feel the restrictions of the road to be restraints. "Thy steps shall not be straitened, although there is a wall on either side, and the road is the narrow way that leads to life, it is broad enough for the sober man, because he goes in a straight line, and does not need half the road to roll about in. The limits which love imposes, and the limit which love accepts, are not narrowing. "I will walk at liberty, for I keep Thy precepts"; and I do not want to go vagrantising at large, but limit myself thankfully to the way which Thou dost mark out. Now what about the other one? "When thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." As I have said, the former promise applies to the hours and the years of life. The latter applies to but a few moments of each man's. Cast your thoughts back over your own days, and, however changeable, perhaps adventurous, and, as we people call it, romantic, some parts of our lives may have been, yet for all that you can put the turning-points, the crises that have called for great efforts, and the gathering of yourselves up, and the calling forth of all your powers to do and to dare, you can put them all inside of a week, in most cases. "When thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble." The greater the speed the greater the risk of stumbling over some obstacle in the way. We all know how many men there are that do very well in the uneventful commonplaces of life, but bring them face to face with some great difficulty or some great trial, and there is a dismal failure. Jesus Christ is ready to make us fit for anything in the way of difficulty, in the way of trial, that can come storming upon us from out of the dark. And He will make us so fit if we follow the injunctions to which I have already been referring. Without His help it is almost certain that when we have to run, our ankles will give, or there will be a stone in the road that we never thought of, and the excitement will sweep us away from principle, and we shall lose our hold on Him; and then it is all up with us. But remember the virtue that comes out victorious in the crisis must have been nourished and cultivated in the humdrum moments. For it is no time to make one's first acquaintance with Jesus Christ when the eyeballs of some ravenous wild beast are staring into ours, and its mouth is open to swallow us. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Ver. 13. Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.—*The hold-fast religion*.—Faith may be well described as taking hold upon Divine instruction. To take "fast hold" is an exhortation which concerns the strength, the reality, the heartiness, and the truthfulness of faith, and the more of

these the better. If to take hold is good, to take fast hold is better. The best instruction is that which comes from God: the truest wisdom is the revelation of God in Christ Jesus; the best understanding is obedience to the will of God, and a diligent learning of those saving truths which God has set before us in His Word.

I. THE METHOD OF TAKING FAST HOLD UPON TRUE RELIGION. At the outset much must depend upon the intense decision which a man feels in his soul with regard to eternal things. This depends much on a man's individuality and force of character. Many are truly religious, but are not intense about anything. Some who in other matters have purpose enough, and strength of mind enough, when they touch the things of God are loose, flimsy, superficial, half-hearted. If the religion of Christ be true, it deserves that we should give our whole selves to it. Our taking fast hold depends upon the thoroughness of our conversion. Another help to a fast hold of Christ is hearty discipleship. Another is a studious consideration of the Word of God. An established Christian is one who not only knows the doctrine, but who also knows the authority for it. An earnest seriousness of character will help towards maintaining a fast hold of Christ. If these things are in us and abound, there will grow around them an experimental verification of the things of God. And in the mode of taking fast hold upon the gospel practical Christianity, practical usefulness, has a great influence.

II. THE DIFFICULTIES OF TAKING FAST HOLD OF INSTRUCTION. 1. This is an age of questioning. Conceited scepticism is in the air. 2. This is an age of worldliness. 3. There is, and always has been, a great desire for novelty. 4. The worst difficulty of all is the corruption of our own hearts.

III. THE BENEFITS OF TAKING FAST HOLD. It gives stability to the Christian character to have a firm grip of the gospel. It will also give strength for service. It will bring joy. Persons of this kind are the very glory of the Church.

IV. THE ARGUMENTS OF THE TEXT. They are three. 1. Take fast hold of true religion, because it is your best friend. 2. It is your treasure. 3. It is your life. Mr. Arnot, in his book upon the Proverbs, tells a story to illustrate this text. He says that in the southern seas an American vessel was attacked by a wounded whale. The huge monster ran out for the length of a mile from the ship, and then turned round, and with the whole force of its acquired speed struck the ship and made it leak at every timber, so as to begin to go down. The sailors got out all their boats, filled them as quickly as they could with the necessities of life, and began to pull away from the ship. Just then two strong men might be seen leaping into the water who swam to the vessel, leaped on board, disappeared for a moment, and then came up, bringing something in their hands. Just as they sprang into the sea down went the vessel, and they were carried round in the vortex, but they were observed to be both of them swimming, not as if struggling to get away, but as if looking for something, which at last they both seized and carried to the boats. What was this treasure? What article could be so valued as to lead them to risk their lives? It was the ship's compass, which had been left behind, without which they could not have found their way out of those lonely southern seas into the high-road of commerce. That compass was life to them, and the gospel of the living God is the same to us. You and I must venture all for the gospel: this infallible Word of God must be guarded to the death. Men may tell us what they please, and say what they will, but we will risk everything sooner than give up those eternal principles by which we have been saved. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Education the business of life:—I. EDUCATION IS THE BUSINESS OF LIFE. Begin with the infant, and observe how, from the very first breath, every stage in its growth is but the antecedent of another, its chief occupation being to get ready for the next. Infancy spreads out into childhood, &c. Thus obviously is life occupied with preparation for the future. To cause men to enter on that future with the best advantage is the purpose of education, in whatever form dispensed. Consisting thus in preparation for the future, it evidently implies three things—1. The development of the faculties. These lie folded up in the child, unobserved and inactive. By assiduous culture they are to be unfolded in their true proportions, and to be made skilful by judicious exercise. 2. The acquisition of knowledge—without which one rushes upon the future like a blind man into a wilderness. Knowledge is safety, light, and power; ignorance is darkness, peril, and imbecility. 3. Special fitness for the special employment on which one is to enter. Education is not to be conducted at random, nor with a merely general intent. It has regard to the peculiar calling of the individual. It would fit him to act well his part in the precise sphere which he is destined to fill. This, then, is one sense in which education is the business of life. It is the business of every season to prepare

for the next. But there is yet a higher sense. Life itself is but one period of existence, antecedent to another and final period. Life itself is but the childhood of the immortal spirit, getting ready for its future youth and eternal manhood. Life itself, therefore, is but one long school-day; its great purpose the discipline of the powers, the acquisition of knowledge, the fitting of the character, in preparation for that immortal action to which the grave introduces. The perfect man—he who is thoroughly furnished by the completest culture of all his powers, faculties, and affections—is educated for heaven. To stop short of this is to leave the Divine work incomplete. Made to reach indefinitely after wisdom, goodness, and happiness, in this world and the next, he can rightfully propose to himself no other end; and his education is in no just sense finished until this end is attained. Whence we observe there are two essential deficiencies in the common judgment: first that the cultivation of the intellect is limited to that small exercise of the mind which just fits for some one occupation; and second, that the cultivation of character is left almost altogether (in all formal education) to circumstance and accident.

II. BY WHAT METHOD THE DESIRED RESULT IS TO BE EFFECTED. There are three processes—by instruction, by circumstances, by self-discipline. 1. Instruction; by which I intend all the express external means of human or of Divine appointment which are used in early or later life. This is sometimes spoken of as including the whole of education. But a little thoughtful observation convinces us that it is far from being so in fact; that in truth formal teaching is little more than offering favourable opportunities and excitements to the individual, which he may neglect, and so, with the best instruction, remain uneducated. Essential as direct instruction may be, if left to itself, unaided and alone, it can accomplish scarce anything. It needs the concurrence of circumstances, and of the will of the instructed. 2. Circumstances have more to do with the acquisition of knowledge and the formation of character than is often supposed. They make the atmosphere by which one is surrounded, the climate in which he resides. They make up that assemblage of invisible, intangible, indescribable influences which, in the moral world as in the natural, give a complexion, hue, constitution, character, to all who are subjected to it; influences to which they of necessity yield, and which they in vain seek to counteract. It is of the first importance in education to give heed to this consideration. Inattention to this is the cause of frequent ill-success in what appear to be the best arranged processes of instruction. Great pains have been taken, and expensive apparatus employed, with most unsatisfactory results. It was the wrong sort of pains. The controlling power of circumstances was overlooked. The influences of situation, companions, example, and social habits, were disregarded. 3. To these processes is to be added that of self-discipline. Without it nothing efficient can be done by force of teaching, or by the best arrangement of most favourable circumstances. The individual must have a desire to make progress, and must exercise his own powers in making it. It is when he cheerfully, with voluntary labour and watching, applies himself to learn and to become good, that success crowns the endeavour. The general uses of this subject are as obvious as they are important. (1) It rebukes the prevalent misconceptions, which bind down the aim of intellectual effort to that drudgery of the world by which the body is supported; which account the rational and immortal spirit sufficiently taught, and well enough employed, when it has become skilful to answer the question, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (2) It rebukes the negligence and self-indulgence of those who, possessing, as we possess, peculiar advantages for the highest intellectual progress, content themselves with the lowest, think mental toil a drudgery, repine at the requisites for improvement, and set the enjoyments of indolence above the solid honours of attainment. (3) It rebukes the yet more common error of setting aside from our notions of education the progress of character, and establishment in virtue. (4) It brings us to the great duty of man, the leading object of life; the self-discipline of the character by which preparation is made for eternity. (*H. Ware, D.D.*) *Take fast hold*:—It is only "instruction" that we must take fast hold of. There are some things that we must not even touch, much less must we try to grasp them. Take fast hold of the wonderful things that are contained in the Bible. 1. We take fast hold of instruction by praying over it. If we pray often over it we shall, of course, think much about it, and then we may understand it better. And if we truly do this we shall, without fail, strive to put the truth that we have thus taken hold of into practice. 2. It is a great help if we seek to impart what we have learned of Jesus. If we tell what we know, it will fix it upon our

minds. If we do not thus take fast hold of instruction, we may lose it. (*J. J. Ellis.*) *Hold fast*:—I. FAST HOLD MUST BE LAID UPON WISDOM'S PRECEPTS. 1. Because many thieves lie in the way to rob us of what wisdom teacheth us—the devil, wicked men, the world, the flesh. 2. Because we may lose our wisdom ourselves—by negligence, by sinful courses. II. WISDOM'S PRECEPTS MUST NOT BE PARTED WITHAL, BUT KEPT SAFE. 1. Because parting with it brings loss of other things, as of our safety and likewise of our comfort. 2. Because it brings much danger, and that to all that is dear to us. III. HOLDING FAST WISDOM IS THE WAY TO LIFE. What thou lovest of heavenly wisdom, so much thou lovest of thy life. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Religious instruction*:—Instruction is not here used for acquisition of knowledge or intellectual enlargement. It is synonymous with wisdom, understanding, heavenly teaching. Note—1. The extreme earnestness which the wise son of David displays in pressing his advice. 2. The text suggests the natural alienation of the heart from instruction. It does not receive it willingly. It does not retain it, if received, without difficulty. 3. The last clause of the text resolves the whole question into a simple and intelligible proposition. It brings the matter to a point. Dost thou desire to live—not the life that now is, the transient and ephemeral existence of a corruptible body—but in that never-ending state when a thousand years will be as one day? Then take fast hold of instruction—in obtaining her thou hast secured thy object, for she is thy life. There is, in that word life, a comprehensiveness which conveys the fulness of joy to the penitent soul. (*Lord Bishop of Winchester.*) *Vigorous steadfastness*:—The path of wisdom requires the most vigorous steadfastness. Hold the lessons of wisdom with a firm and unrelaxable tenacity; grasp them as the drowning man the rope that is thrown out for his rescue. "Firmness," said Burns, "both in sufferance and exertion, is a character which I would wish to possess. I have always despised the whining yelp of complaint, and the cowardly, feeble resolve." (*David Thomas, D.D.*) *A wise caution*:—I. WE MUST TAKE HEED OF FALLING IN WITH SIN AND SINNERS. Our teacher having, like a faithful guide, shown us the right paths (ver. 11), here warns us of the by-paths into which we are in danger of being drawn aside. Those that have been well educated, and trained up in the way they should go, let them not so much as enter into it, no, not to make a trial of it, lest it prove a dangerous experiment, and difficult to retreat with safety. "Venture not into the company of those who are infected with the plague, no, not though thou think thyself guarded with an antidote." II. IF AT ANY TIME WE ARE INVEIGLED INTO AN EVIL WAY, WE MUST HASTEN OUT OF IT. If, ere thou wast aware, thou didst enter in at the gate, because it was wide, go not on in the way of evil men. As soon as thou art made sensible of thy mistake, retire immediately; take not a step more, stay not a minute longer, in the way that certainly leads to destruction. III. WE MUST DREAD AND DETEST THE WAY OF SIN AND SINNERS, AND DECLINE THEM WITH THE UTMOST CARE IMAGINABLE. (*Matthew Henry.*) *Popular amusements*:—This advice bears, in its practical relation, on two important features developed in practical affairs. It strikes at the way of the wicked—1. As it is traced in those open violations of integrity which are condemned alike by the laws of man and the laws of God; and—2. In that great class of sins which falls under the term "dissipation" in ordinary life, which is condemned by the laws of God, and too frequently tolerated by the laws of man, which is, in itself, in fact, too evanescent, too much a thing of the heart, sinks into too great triviality, is too personal in its character, involving too exclusively the sacrifice of a man's own soul and life, and the dishonour of his Creator, to fall within the province of human legislation. Popular amusements bear directly upon both these classes of crime. They form a certain fascinating territory—a frontier lying between them and the practice of godliness. To allure the youth, the territories of criminality must be surrounded with a frontier of fascinating pleasures. I. EVERY STEP YOU TAKE IN THESE FORBIDDEN GRATIFICATIONS IS TAKEN AT YOUR OWN COST. All the difficulties that will occur to you there are encountered at your own expense. In the very first principle of starting you forfeit all the protection, the guidance, and the help which man may expect at any time, in justifiable engagements, at the hand of God. God has designed that the whole of life should be conducted in a subjugation of the mind to His own teachings; and, in the path of these forbidden pleasures, amongst the allurements that awaken thoughtlessness of Him, and draw the heart from Him, there is no covenanted protection and guidance, and in that abandonment from God he has the elements of the final curse. II. THE POPULAR AMUSEMENTS OF OUR TIME ARE TO BE REPREHENDED AND FORSAKEN, BECAUSE THEY ARE ALWAYS ATTENDED

WITH INDUCEMENTS TO GREATER WRONG. It is not merely the stealing and subtle influence that draws the heart away from God ; it is not merely the dreadful effect which the fascination has in soothing down the mind into a state of self-gratification ; it is not merely the fact that these delusive pleasures draw the mind away from everything distinctly religious ; but they stand surrounded with inducements to drive the spirit home to the point in which it must break through the restrictions, not of Divine law only, but of human law also. III. THE DIRECT INFLUENCE OF THE HABITS FORMED IN SCENES OF POPULAR AMUSEMENT IS ALTOGETHER OPPOSED TO THE EXERCISE OF VITAL GODLINESS. In cases I have known, there was the declination of the habits of godliness, and the very gift of prayer had almost ceased ; every element of piety was crippled. It is said that these popular amusements are patronised by religious people, and that they may at times be rendered subservient to virtue. The answer is that the peril in them wholly outweighs every advantage that can be derived from them. (*Charles Stovel.*)

Curiosity a temptation to sin :—One chief cause of wickedness is our curiosity to have some fellowship with darkness, some experience of sin, to know what the pleasures of sin are like. Not to know sin by experience brings upon a man the laughter and jests of his companions. Curiosity brought about Eve's fall ; and a wanton roving after things forbidden, a curiosity to know what it was to be as the heathen, was one chief source of the idolatries of the Jews. This delusion arises from Satan's craft. He knows that if he can get us once to sin, he can easily make us sin twice or thrice, till at length we are taken captive at his will. He sees that curiosity is man's great and first snare. He therefore tempts men violently while the world is new to them, and hopes and feelings are eager and restless. The great thing in religion is to set off well, to resist the beginnings of evil ; to flee temptation ; and for these reasons—1. It is hardly possible to delay our flight, without rendering flight impossible. Directly we are made aware of temptation we shall, if we are wise, turn our backs upon it, without waiting to think and reason about it ; we shall engage our mind in other thoughts. 2. If we admit evil thoughts we shall make ourselves familiar with them. Our great security against sin lies in being shocked at it. 3. There is a tendency to repeat an act of sin once committed. 4. The end of sinning is to enslave us to it. Our safeguard lies in obeying our Lord's simple but comprehensive precept, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." (*Plain Sermons by Contributors to the "Tracts for the Times."*)

Breakers ahead :—To the young it may be said, "Whatever be the evil course that tempts you, your only safety lies in determined refusal to take a single step in that direction, to tamper for a moment with the temptation" ; and that this axiom may be as a nail fastened in a sure place, Solomon gives it six strong blows with the hammer, saying in regard to every such devious and sinful path, "Enter not, go not in it, avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." Some of the courses against which we need to be warned. 1. The way of the fraudulent. If you cannot be rich without guile be content to be poor. To act or imply what is false is as bad as to utter a lie. 2. The way of the extravagant. Spending money you do not possess ; against debt. Start in life as you mean to continue, and let this be one of your maxims, "Owe no man anything." 3. The way of the gambler. This loathsome cancer is eating into the very vitals of English society. There is no evil course that is more insidious in its commencement, or more insatiable in the appetite it awakens. 4. The way of the drinker. Have the good sense to make a disaster impossible by simply refusing to touch the dangerous thing. 5. The way of the libertine. Shut your ear against every whisper of immodesty. 6. The path of the scoffer. This danger almost always springs from unwise companionships. One sceptic in an office may unsettle all his fellows. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*)

Contamination of evil society :—On the moors of Yorkshire there is a stream of water which goes by the name of the "Ochre Spring." It rises high up in the hills, and runs on bright and sparkling for a short distance, when it suddenly becomes a dark and muddy yellow. What is the reason of this ? It has been passing through a bed of ochre, and so it flows on for miles, thick and sluggish, useless and unpleasant. The world is full of such beds of ochre. . . . Enter not in the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men. (*Church of England Teachers' Magazine.*)

The two paths :—I. THE PATH OF THE WICKED. Bad men are here described in such terms as imply a very wretched state of society. They delight in acts of violence and plunder. Such men form the criminal classes. There are other evil-doers who are much more dangerous, because their evil-doing is not so criminal, is not usually of a sort that exposes them to the penalties of the

law. One feature of bad men is pointed out. They cannot rest unless they do mischief to some one. There are men who take an intense pleasure in corrupting their juniors and making them as bad as themselves. One of the chief pleasures of sin lies in making others sinful, just as, on the other hand, one of the chief pleasures of goodness is making others good. The tempter prefers the form of the serpent, and does his evil work subtly, slyly, stealthily. Yet the wicked are blind, blinded sometimes by ignorance, sometimes by passion. They do not see what their true interest is. II. **THE PATH OF THE JUST.** "As the shining light." By the "just" we are to understand the good man; not a man altogether free from sin, but one who, though far from faultless, sincerely desires and earnestly strives to live in all things according to the will of God. The word "just" signifies "commanded." A just man is a commanded man, a man whom God commands, a man who acts according to God's commandments. The just man is something more than a man who is true, honest, fair in his treatment of his fellow-men. The just man is he who, to the full extent of the knowledge of God's will, obeys it, or does his best to obey it, and so is a commanded man. The path of the just is the just man's course of life. We have a description of a good man's life in its character, its progress, its perfection. Light in Scripture bears several meanings. It means knowledge in relation to the mind, holiness in relation to the conscience, happiness in relation to the heart. The life of a just man is a life of growing knowledge, holiness, and happiness. "Unto the perfect day." What is the perfect day? Never seen or experienced by Christians in this world. A poor idea of the perfect day that man must have who thinks that he has already attained to it. The difference between day and night is due to this, that the portion of the earth on which we live turns towards or from the sun. And it is the turning of our souls towards Him who is the Sun of Righteousness that makes our night of ignorance and sorrow turn into the day of knowledge and goodness and happiness. (Hugh Stowell Brown.)

Ver. 15. Avoid it.—*Companionships to be avoided*:—The same decision of character which men evidence in their worldly affairs is necessary also in the affairs of eternity. The duty here enjoined is one by no means pleasing to the natural mind, and cannot possibly be softened down to suit the taste of the worldly man. It depends not upon our inclination, but upon the command of God. Our salvation is at stake. I. **WHAT SOCIETY WE ARE TO AVOID.** Now here there can be no difficulty with regard to persons of openly immoral lives, whose society none but persons like themselves can possibly approve. Again, the case of those who boldly deny religion, or are attempting to make converts to their own infidel opinions, is equally clear. But, doubtless, the maxim goes much further; so that we ought to shun the ways, not of these more notorious characters only, but in general the ways of all who do not love and fear God. These persons may be differently divided, and may have various shades of virtue and vice amongst them. A cold-hearted formalist, an inconsistent professor of religion, a man who knows what is right and Scriptural, but has no true feeling of piety in his soul, is a dangerous companion for him who would walk humbly with his God. Shall we, it may be said, go out of the world and forsake even our friends and connections in life because they may not be religious? II. **HOW FAR THE SOCIETY OF THOSE WHO DO NOT LOVE AND FEAR GOD IS TO BE AVOIDED.** Now here we cannot as Christians hesitate to admit that if it could be proved that the Word of God required absolute and unceasing seclusion from all who are not partakers of true religion, it would be our duty to obey the command. But it is not necessary, or indeed Scriptural, to suppose that this separation from all worldly things and persons is thus entire and absolute, for then, as the apostle argues, we must needs go out of the world. We may lawfully have commerce and transact our daily affairs with various persons who are not partakers of true religion. Neither, again, must we forsake the professing Church of Christ merely because many hypocrites and false members are to be found connected with it. In this world the tares and the wheat must thus grow together, and to try completely to separate them would be a vain attempt. Nor, still further, are we so to forsake the society of men as to prevent our labouring for their salvation. We may converse with sinners for their good. What we are then to avoid is unnecessary familiarity with sinners and a disposition to comply with their sins. When David would describe "a blessed man," he speaks of him as not walking in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standing in the way of sinners, nor sitting in the seat of the scornful. If our intercourse with men be so conducted as to weaken our affections

towards God, destroy the tenderness of our conscience, make us forget or neglect our souls, or unfit us for prayer and communion with our Maker, we may be assured we have transgressed the Scriptural limit. III. But it may be asked, **WHY, AFTER ALL, IS THE PATH OF SINNERS TO BE THUS CAREFULLY AVOIDED?** Why should Solomon so multiply his cautions—"Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away"? **What is the real danger?** The duty under consideration ought to be attended to, both for our own sake and for that of others. Let us suppose, then, that a person is really in earnest respecting his salvation, and let us examine what will be the effect of his neglecting the duty in question. Alas, how hard will he find it to preserve the true spirit of religion in the midst of worldly society! Evil example will gradually prevail. The conversation of the wicked has far more power to corrupt the righteous than the conversation of the righteous to amend the wicked; just as it is much easier for the healthy to become diseased by communication with the sick than for the sick to be restored by communication with the healthy. One reason why the society of those who are not truly religious will be a great hindrance to the Christian is that if he will not give up the dictates of his conscience he must expect to meet with the scoffs of men. There would be less danger to the Christian in mixing with sinners if it were not that they are always ready to entice him to their evil ways. Good men, it is to be lamented, are not usually as anxious to bring their companions to the knowledge and practice of true religion as bad men often are to tempt the good to wander from it. Many a person, after feeling his heart impressed with the things belonging to his eternal peace, has been fatally ruined by mixing with those who viewed his religion with suspicion or contempt, and were desirous to make him forget the sacred impression. Besides, if we truly desire to serve God, the company of the wicked will be offensive to us. But the strongest reason for obeying the command in the text is that our salvation is endangered by the society of the wicked. The man of wisdom hath taught us, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." (*Christian Observer*.) *Keep at a distance*:—A noble ship, with British colours flying was making its way across the ocean on a summer afternoon. Yet the face of the pilot wore an expression of deep anxiety, and he cast many uneasy glances in one direction, while steadily steering the opposite way. The captain came up to him with a pale and anxious countenance. "Surely we must now be safe?" "It is best to err on the right side. We can easily get too near, but we can hardly keep at too great a distance." What was this mysterious peril? It was a whirlpool, one of those deceitful eddies which, once approached, will draw the finest vessel irresistibly into certain destruction. There are worse whirlpools on land than those of the ocean. There are sins which, if you once come within their influence, are almost sure to drag you into their vortex of ruin. Is not drunkenness one of these? Is not gambling one of these? Is not dishonesty one of these? Sins of every kind have something of this fatal fascination, but some more than others. *Keep at a distance from the path of the destroyer.* *Evil to be avoided*:—There is no need of your trying to face certain temptations. You are foolhardy to try it. Your only safety is in flight. It is as fifty against five thousand. If you be given to appetite, escape the presence of decanter and demijohn. If you are given to pride, go not amidst things that flatter it. If your proclivity be toward uncleanness, like Job make a covenant with your eyes, that you look not upon a maid. (*T. De Witt Talmage*.)

Ver. 16. Their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.—*The proselytism of error*:—It is of the wicked that Solomon here speaks. What a restlessness does this indicate! What a zeal in a bad cause! The subject suggested by the text is the restless activity of evil men in the propagation of evil. A man is accountable for his creed as well as for his practice—accountable inasmuch as it must be through his own fault that he believes what is false just as much as it is through his own fault that he does what is wrong. This takes all force from the objection that they who sleep not except they bring over others to what themselves hold to be true are performing a duty rather than committing a sin. It would seem as though error were far more energetic than truth. Why should falsehood be thus zealous in diffusing itself? Allowing that it sets an example, allowing that it addresses a rebuke to truth, how are we to account for its being so surprisingly energetic and devoted? The holder of falsehood may make religion a matter of party. Error is that which the warmest adherent may support from pride, or jealousy, or ambition, but truth is that which can enlist these passions in none but

the hypocrite. Error can work on all the corruptions of our nature, whereas truth has to hold these corruptions in check. That falsehood should have a missionary spirit follows on the fact of its being falsehood, and therefore forced to lean upon others for support. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 18. The path of the just is as the shining light.—*The path of the just*:—The essentials of a just man's character have been in all ages the same. The path, the life-course, of such a man, is like the shining light. I do not think that the path of the justified is compared to the course of the sun, from the period of his appearance in the morning to the time of his meridian height. The sun is an emblem, not of the justified, but of the Justifier. The just are those whom the Sun of Righteousness shines upon. The new life of the converted is like the morning light. At first it seems an uncertain struggle between the darkness and the dawn. It quivers long in the balance. When the contest begins, however, the result is not doubtful, although it may for a time appear so. Once begun, it shineth more and more unto the perfect day; and it is perfect day when the sun has arisen, as compared with the sweet but feeble tints of earliest dawning. The path of the just will be like the morning, it will increase until dawn break into day. The analogy holds good more exactly still, if we take into view the actually ascertained motions of the planetary system. When any portion of the earth's surface begins to experience a dawn diminishing its darkness, it is because that portion is gradually turning round towards the sun; while any part of the earth lies away from the sun, in proportion to the measure of its aversion, it is dark and cold; in proportion as it turns to him again, its atmosphere grows clearer, until, in its gradual progress, it comes in sight of the sun, and its day is perfect then. The path of the just is precisely like this. Arrested in his darkness by a love in Christ, which he does not understand as yet, he is secretly drawn towards Him in whom that love, in infinite measure, is treasured up. As he is drawn nearer, his light increases, until at last he finds himself in the presence of the Lord. There follows in the text a counterpart intimation fitted to overawe the boldest heart. "The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble." The darkness is in him. A dark place in the path may be got over, but darkness in his own heart the traveller carries with him wherever he goes. To the blind, every place and every time is alike dark. It is an "evil heart of unbelief." The way to get light is to turn from sin. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The Christian's light*:—The righteous man possesses an understanding brightened by the rays of Divine truth, for the Sun of Righteousness hath shone into his soul. His heart is beautified by the light of purity, diffusing a pleasant lustre around him in his conversation; and his spirit is cheered with the light of joy and consolation from the countenance of God. This light is not like that of a taper which burns itself away into darkness, but like that of the morning sun, which shines brighter and brighter, till it blazes with meridian splendour. (*G. Lawson.*) *The path of the just*:—The point of resemblance between the path of the just and the shining light. I. AS TO ORIGIN. The shining light emerges from the darkness at the dawn of the day, and so does the path of the just, or the believer on the morning of conversion. There is a great spiritual crisis, call it by whatever name you will. Our Lord speaks of it as a new birth. II. AS TO PROGRESS. There should be progress—1. In knowledge of Divine things. 2. In holiness of heart and life. 3. In Christian usefulness and activity. 4. In growing meetness for heaven. III. AS TO PERFECTION. Progress ending in perfection, but not here. The perfect day is not for earth, but for heaven. As to knowledge of Divine things, here we know in part, there we shall know even as we are known. Here the feeble intellect is soon exhausted in its search after knowledge, there it shall soar with untiring wing. As to purity, what a change! There are spots on the disc of the brightest sun that ever shone, but there are none on the spotless robes that have been made white in the blood of the Lamb. As to useful activity, it will assume a more exalted character, it will embrace a wider range. (*A. Wallace, D.D.*) *The path of the just*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THIS MAN—the just man. A just or righteous man is he who conforms himself to the laws of God's government over men. The perfectly just man is he who has never in any matter trampled upon the rule of life laid down by the all-wise God, and who continues to walk onwards by the same perfect rule. But no such character is to be found among men. The all-wise God has found out a way whereby He may be just and the justifier of them that believe in Jesus. All the righteousness and merit of God's own Son becomes theirs. The child of faith is the only just man. II. THE STARTING-POINT OF HIS LIFE-COURSE—from dawn. 1. The

believer is likened to the light, inasmuch as now he has attained to wisdom, holiness, and happiness. Light, as symbolical of the good, speaks to us of the enlightenment of the understanding, the purity of holiness, and true happiness. Light is also significant of natural good, of happiness. 2. The believer is likened to the shining light, or the bright dawn of morning. This figure speaks to us of the transcendent beauty of holiness. It is the heavenly ideal of all that is bright and fair and fresh. III. HIS ACTUAL COURSE—shineth more and more. Growth is the one grand law in the kingdom of light. The believer at his new birth is but a babe in Christ. The children of the kingdom grow from strength to strength. Where there is no growth there is no life. Perfect manhood, "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ," is the goal short of which no child of the Father dare stop. Every being grows according to the measure of his own inward nature, and so does the child of God. This Divine necessity of the Christian's growth is symbolised by the figure of the text. The Christian's growth, like all growth, is gradual; it even proceeds often by means of apparent retrogressions. Often the Christian seems to retrograde. Yet even from a sad eclipse he will come forth, shining with a fuller splendour of blessed light. IV. HIS GOAL—everlasting noon—the "perfect day." From the path of the just all shadows of the darkness shall pass away. Children of light though we be, we are often doing the deeds of darkness and walking in the dark and cloudy day of trial. But it shall not be so always. A Godlike purity, and God Himself as our joy, constitute the two elements of the light of the perfect day, into which our faith and patience grow more and more. (*James Hamilton, M.A.*) *The path of the just:—I. THE BELIEVER'S NATURAL STATE OF DARKNESS AND MISERY. II. THE BRILLIANT COURSE HE PURSUES AFTER BEING TURNED FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT. His way is as the "shining light."* 1. Beautiful in its appearance. The light of grace begins from the first to adorn the actions of the righteous. Their simplicity of mind and teachableness of spirit endear them to all their brethren; their lowliness and humility attract universal notice, while the fervour of their love excites admiration and esteem. The very shades in their character serve as a contrast to the excellency of the change that has passed upon them. As they proceed, their graces are more matured, and even thus early they "adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour." 2. They shall continue to be beneficial in their influence. They have a work to do, and God will ensure them in a course of well-doing, or the Divine purpose would fail. 3. Believers, like the sun, are constant in their progress. The sun invariably pursues his wonted course. The believer's progress is directed by the same power. III. THE GLORIOUS CONSUMMATION OF THE TEXT. (*The National Preacher.*) *The path of the just:—It is not from the observation of earthly circumstances that we believe in the reign of eternal righteousness. It is because the voice of God has spoken the truth into the hearts of men, because we are ethical beings, because we know by the divinest instinct within us that righteousness reigns. The destiny of men is ethically determined. It is not so altogether upon this earth, where great distinctions are created through other circumstances; but in the long run, in the eternal issue, moral character will determine destiny.* I. THE BEAUTY OF THE SIMILE. The reference is evidently to the light of day, the sunlight. It suggests—1. Gladness. 2. Power. 3. Beauty. 4. Order. 5. Glory. II. THE PROGRESSIVE ASPECT. From dawn to full day. The life of the just is not completed at once. All progress. Not all at the same rate. III. THE WORDS "PATH OF THE JUST" INCLUDE CHARACTER, CONDITION, AND DESTINY. The light of goodness, of joy, and of glorious destiny. And these three things are involved in one another. (*John Thomas, M.A.*) *The path of the just, like the shining light:—Religious virtue is recommended to our affectionate esteem, to our choice and constant pursuit, by the character of wisdom. The goodness of the sincere is like the morning dawn, which is weak in its beginning, but gradually increases in brightness, till it arises to its meridian glory. The path of the just is nothing else but the practice of virtue, of moral piety, of righteousness, of temperance, of charity. The whole of virtue is comprehended, and every essential branch of it must be reduced to practice in the path of the just.* 1. The way of the just, morally considered, is a regular scheme formed according to one model, and under one uniform direction. The principle of virtue is always an unvarying guide, admirable for its simplicity, without a mixture of interfering counsels, without a diversity of inconsistent views. 2. The path of the just is accompanied with inward serenity and satisfaction. The principles of religion, diffusing their influence through the whole scheme of life, set everything about us in a fair and amiable

light. 3. The path of the just sends light abroad—that is, communicates profitable instruction to, and hath a useful influence on, those who have the opportunity of observing it. The path of the just is like the spring of the day animated by an inward undecaying principle; it rises in splendour from its low and more obscure beginnings, going on gradually to perfection. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *The path of the just, or persevering piety*:—The just man here is not the man who merely begins, it is the man who perseveres. This man's path is no meteor, which gleams and expires; nor rising day, lowering into mist and darkness; it is the path of the cloudless light of heaven. Persevering piety is as the light that shineth more and more. I. BECAUSE OF THE INCREASING DEMONSTRATION WHICH IT FURNISHES OF THE TRUTH AND EXCELLENCY OF RELIGION. There are many proofs of that excellency, some argumentative, others experimental. These last have always an increasing power. II. PERSEVERING PIETY POSSESSES AN INCREASING ASSURANCE OF THE DIVINE FAVOUR. This is the very light of the soul, the only source of peace in the conscience. At first it is obtained by faith; but in the case we are supposing faith grows into a habit, and keeps the soul in perfect peace. III. PERSEVERING PIETY HAS INCREASING PLEASURES. There can be no growing happiness without a preserved sense of Divine acceptance. Piety opens sources of mental pleasures: pure, because not applied to sinful objects; rich and constant, because flowing from sources of real good. All these have in them a principle of increase. Increasing pleasures are opened by the Word and ordinances of God, by Christian communion and religious exertions. All these, to a spirit prepared for them by the salvation which is of grace, through faith, present pleasures which never cloy, which afford richer and still richer satisfaction. IV. PERSEVERING PIETY HAS THE ADVANTAGE OF AN INCREASING EVIDENCE OF THE WISDOM AND CARE OF GOD IN HIS PROVIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS. The man who perseveres in piety is more wise to see, and more careful to mark, the abounding instances of Divine interposition. V. PERSEVERING PIETY HAS BRIGHTER AND MORE CHEERING VIEWS OF THE ETERNAL STATE. The conviction of the world's vanity, experience of the world's trials, are designed to quicken the progress of the affections towards man's heavenly home. Everything in piety moves towards God; but it is God in heaven, as fully revealed there. 1. See, then, that your path be indeed the path of the just. Walk in it by the strength of regenerate habits, fed by prayer, and by communion with God. 2. Remember that the way of the wicked is darkness; it is all error and perplexity. 3. Recollect, for your encouragement, that, bright and cheering as is the light upon your path, it is but the light of the morning. (*R. Watson.*) *Two paths before the young man*:—The Word of God hath imposed upon man a choice of alternatives. Two ways—two ends; two characters—two consequences; two aims or objects in the life that now is—two states or conditions in the life that is to come. When the alternative is presented to a rational and responsible being we think he can only make one choice; he would surely reject the evil and embrace the good. Two things, however, are practically opposed to this reasonable conclusion; the choice may be evaded or postponed, and human philosophy and vain deceit have left no artifices unassayed to perplex what God has made straight. The period of life when for the most part the path of the individual is to be chosen is that of youth; a stage of life in which the passions are strong, and the judgment is weak, the mind sometimes scantily furnished, and the will too often altogether unregulated and uncontrolled. Hence, in a moral sense, the period of youth is doubly endangered, because, impetuous and precipitate in its very nature, and urged by impulse rather than actuated by principle, it will not readily pause to deliberate at all; and if it does, false views are enticingly presented to it. The one of these dangers—which the apostle calls the “vain deceit of philosophy”—may be escaped by taking truth for a counsellor; and the other—the perilous folly of procrastination—by hearkening to reason as our guide. I. THE PATH OF THE JUST. The path of “light” is that which discloses to those who pursue it their own motive of action; to others who examine them, their principles; and both to themselves and to others who assume the same standard of judgment, the consequences of those actions. Ignorance of what is personally, relatively, socially, or even politically right, can never co-exist with a genuine belief in the gospel of Christ Jesus. By the “just” we understand the man who has determined to do right simply because it is right; resolving all first principles of right into the expressed and recorded will of God. By the “path” of such a man we understand the habitual tenor of his course and conduct among mankind. II. THE WAY OF THE WICKED. By the “wicked” we understand the man who is indifferent to that which is good; who acknowledges, or at least obeys, no law of action but his own

pleasure, or his own interest, or his own inclination, or his own appetite. The way of such a man is "darkness," from the absence of any fixed principle or of any certain end. If peace is essential to happiness, on Scriptural principles happiness never can be realised by the ungodly. All nature is full of enemies to him who hath not God for his friend. See, then, the importance of making the right choice in early life. (*Thomas Dale, M.A.*) *Of increase of grace, and perseverance therein unto the end.*—Increase of grace and perseverance are benefits flowing from or accompanying justification. I. INCREASE OR GROWTH OF GRACE. That real grace does increase is evident from three things. Scripture testimony. God has appointed a certain stature that His children shall grow to. This is the end of Divine influences and the effect of Divine ordinances. II. HOW A CHRISTIAN GROWS IN GRACE. 1. Inward, into Christ. 2. Outward, in good works, in all the parts of a holy life, piety towards God, and righteousness towards men. 3. Upward, in a heavenly disposition. 4. Downward, in humility, self-denial, self-loathing, resignation to the will of God. III. THE CAUSES OF THIS GROWTH. 1. Union with Christ. 2. Communion with Christ in His ordinances and in His providences. IV. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE GROWTHS. 1. True Christian growth is universal. 2. The hypocrite soon comes to a stand, the Christian goes on to perfection. V. TRUE GRACE GROWS ALWAYS. 1. It does not always grow, nor at every particular season. 2. It never decays utterly. 3. A Christian may be growing and yet not be sensible of it. This may cause fear and trembling. (*T. Boston.*) *Perseverance in grace* is another benefit flowing from or accompanying justification. I. WHAT THIS PERSEVERANCE IS. To persevere is to continue and abide in a state into which one is brought. II. HOW IS THIS PERSEVERANCE TO BE UNDERSTOOD. 1. Not of all who profess Christ. 2. Of all real saints, those who are endowed with saving grace. Saints may lose the evidence of grace, so that they cannot discern it in themselves. They may lose the exercise of grace. They may lose much of the measure of grace they have had. III. THE SAINTS SHALL PERSEVERE TO THE END. IV. WHAT ARE THE THINGS WHICH MAKE HYPOCRITES FALL AWAY? 1. Satan's temptations. 2. The world's snares. 3. The corruptions and lusts of the heart. V. THE GROUNDS OF THE PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS. 1. The unchangeable decree of God's election flowing from the free and unchangeable love of the Father to them. 2. The merit and intercession of Christ the Son. 3. The perpetual abiding of the Spirit. 4. The nature of the covenant of grace. VI. THE MEANS OF PERSEVERANCE. 1. God's ordinances and providences. 2. The duties of religion, and exercise of the graces, faith, fear, watchfulness, &c. Then look well to the foundation of your religion, for sincerity will last, but hypocrisy is a disease in the vitals that will end in death. Let those whose care it is to be found in Christ be comforted amidst all their temptations, snares, and corruptions, in that God has begun the good work and will perfect it. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *The Christian life a progressive state*:—I. IT IS IN EVERY MAN'S POWER TO MAKE HIS LIFE A PROGRESSIVE STATE. If we trace the progress of the human mind from the first dawnings of sense and reason, we may see from what small beginnings it acquires a prodigious store of intellectual knowledge. The moral powers, like the natural perfections of the body, are more equally distributed than the intellectual; and in them there is as large a field laid open for our advancement towards perfection as there is in the intellectual. No man knows what he can do till he is firmly resolved to do whatever he can. There are often abilities unknown to the possessors which lie hid in the mind for want of an occasion to call them forth. One can scarcely have too high an opinion of the powers of the human soul, especially in the affair of our salvation, and scarce too low an opinion of men's inclinations to exert these powers in that important case. But God gives to every man adapted and effectual grace. We have the same natural power, the same gracious aid and assistance, for persevering and improving in every virtue and grace, as we had originally for attaining them. What, then, should restrain or hinder our continual progress? One reason why men do not quicken their pace more in the ways of goodness is the mistaken judgment they form by using a deceitful standard. They are not at any trouble to get exact notions of perfection and goodness, and to examine their lives by such truly imitable patterns. So far, then, from considering this life as a dull round of the same insignificant trifles, we ought to look upon it as an indefinite line wherein every step we take is, or ought to be, an important and valuable advance in goodness. II. SOME REASONS AND CONSIDERATIONS TO ENGAGE US IN SUCH A PRACTICE. 1. This progressive state is our duty. God's design is to

make men as virtuous and pious as possible. It is in our power to make a constant and continued progress in the kinds of these perfections, and thence arises our obligation to advance in the degrees as far as the sum of our faculties, exercised and improved to the utmost, can carry us. Our condemnation will not lie in this, that we did not exactly transcribe the original, but that we did not make the copy so complete as was in our power. If a man thinks himself already as virtuous and good as he needs to be, it is a certain sign that he has not yet arrived at any eminence in virtue. 2. The advantages we shall reap from the progressive state. (1) It will supersede the trust and confidence which too many are apt to repose in repentance. (2) It is the best means for bringing us to a uniform and unreserved obedience. (3) It is the only security for our perseverance in such obedience. (4) It is the best testimony we can have of our being in a salvable condition. Reflections: 1. How groundless and unreasonable are all complaints of human life as an insignificant, capricious, and wayward state. 2. If the progressive is the right state of life, what shall we think of those who are pursuing an opposite course? (*J. Seed, M.A.*) *The progressive lustre of the Christian's character and example*:—The use of light is twofold—it enables us to see and to be seen; and from this twofold use of light arises a twofold application of the text. I. THE PATH OF THE JUST, AS HE SEES IT HIMSELF. "As a shining light." 1. Because it is the path of Christ. He is the true light. Whatever light exists upon earth, whether physical, intellectual, or spiritual, comes from Him as the Creator by whom all things were made. By Him the lights of reason and of conscience were lit up in the soul of man to guide him to a knowledge of God and duty. And after the candle of the Lord had been so dimmed and defiled by sin as to become comparatively useless, then did He, as the Sun of Righteousness, arise with healing in His beams, to restore in the minds of His believing people that light which sin had so grievously obscured and beclouded. To this light the eyes of God's people were from the earliest ages of the world directed, for its dawn was coeval with the fall of man. Taking the Lord Jesus as his guide and exemplar in the ways of salvation, the path of the just is as a shining light. 2. In respect of the increasing certainty and confidence wherewith he walks in it. As the rays of light move in straight lines, so also the path of the just is a straightforward path—free from those perplexing turnings and windings which mark the ways of worldly wisdom and carnal policy. It is also a path of security in which he can walk without fear of danger. The path is moreover pleasant and joyful. So far, then, as his own understanding and feelings are concerned, the analogy between the path of the just and the shining light is evident and exact. II. THE PATH OF THE JUST AS IT APPEARS TO HIS NEIGHBOURS. As the light of Divine truth and love is reflected to us from the person and character of our Lord Jesus Christ, in like manner the light of His grace and holiness is reflected to the world from the lives and characters of His faithful disciples. As a comet increases in brilliancy in proportion to the nearness of its approach to the sun, so the Christian's light will always be more conspicuous in proportion to the closeness of his communion with the Sun of Righteousness. As light is the most plain and conspicuous object in nature, so the Christian, walking in the integrity of his heart, is so transparent and straightforward a character as to be known and approved of all. As the same light shining upon a smooth and polished surface is reflected with greater lustre than from a rough and muddy one, so the same grace is reflected with greater brilliancy by some Christians than by others. As a professed follower and disciple of the Son of God, the Christian is imperatively called upon to let his "light shine before men." If we are the children of light, we are called upon to walk as such. Beware, then, of continuing in the dim twilight of a lukewarm and unstable profession. Look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. Take Him for your guide and exemplar, and He will assuredly lead you to everlasting joy. (*William Ford Vance, M.A.*) *Quiet progress*:—All life means progress. Stagnation is death. Our life is either a halt, a return, or a pressing forward. I. IN QUIET TIMES WE SEE MORE OF THE TRUTH. II. IT SHOWS US MORE IN TRUTH. Not only more of it, but more in it. III. IN QUIET PROGRESS WE MAKE MORE USE OF TRUTH. Through quiet progress in our lives, we are extending Christ's kingdom. IV. IN THIS QUIET PROGRESS YOU WILL BE MORE RECONCILED TO CHANGES THAT MUST COME. V. WE ARE MORE RESTFUL IN THE INNER EVIDENCES OF TRUTH. (*W. M. Statham.*) *On the progressive nature of religion in the soul*:—We derive a great part of our ideas from comparison, and the mind is pleased with similitudes. No comparison can be more appropriate and beautiful than that employed in the text. I. THE CHARACTER WHICH IS HERE DENOTED BY THE TERM "JUST." "Just" expresses a person who has, without omission or fault, fulfilled

every branch of moral obligation. The same word is employed to denote that character which extends not its virtuous exertions beyond the discharge of the demands of strict justice. A distinction is made between justice and goodness. "Just" also characterises the person who, having adopted right principles, directs his conduct by them, as far as is compatible with human infirmity. The term is also employed to signify those who, through the merits of Jesus Christ, and the means of grace and salvation which He hath instituted, are restored to the favour of God. The two last of these meanings come into the text. The just man here is he who, with an understanding as much enlightened as his situation will permit, and with a heart impressed with the importance of religion, endeavours to fulfil the law of God, through the whole of his conduct, and renders the cultivation of holiness and virtue his grand and predominant object. II. ALL THE FACULTIES OF MAN ARE OF A PROGRESSIVE NATURE. The human faculties ascend to the most sublime attainments; but for this progressive and boundless improvement, culture and discipline are necessary. The faith of the just man, though founded on rational convictions, will, at first, be weak and wavering. Whether he contemplate nature or revelation, he will meet with obscurity to perplex, with difficulties to embarrass, and with objections to stagger him. But though these obscurities hang over the path of the good man, and these obstacles start up, as he advances, they neither involve him in complete darkness, nor even retard his progress. As the faith of the man truly pious advances with increasing brightness, his works observe the same tenor. From the frailties and defects incident to humanity, the man of piety and virtue is not exempt. But the good man sins from infirmity alone, loathes himself on account of every fault he commits, and strives to acquire greater firmness and resolution against future temptations. Advancing in his virtuous progress, he acquires, at every step, fresh vigour and alacrity, and, at last, arrives at that confirmed habit of obedience, which places him beyond the power of such temptations as seem to other men irresistible, and enables him, through Divine grace, to triumph, in some measure, over nature herself. The good man having the principles of virtue lodged in his soul, and gradually brought forward by Divine energy, begins his course with difficulty, and amidst obscurity and temptation. Gradually doubts and difficulties disappear, and he rises at last to that settled temper of virtue and holiness which makes him "a light shining in a dark place." (*W. L. Brown, D.D.*)

Signs of progress.—In whatever path we set out, there is no standing still. The grace of God, which is given to men, lies not dormant. I. HOW SHALL WE KNOW IF WE HAVE MADE PROGRESS IN THE PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS? 1. Are you sensible of your faults and imperfections? The first indication of wisdom is to confess our ignorance, and the first step to virtue is to be sensible of our own imperfections. Till we feel our own weakness we can never be strong in the Lord; we can never rise in the Divine sight till we sink in our own estimation. 2. What is the strength of your attachment to the cause of righteousness? Are you enamoured with the beauty of holiness? Men will never imitate what they do not love. If, then, you are not lovers of goodness and virtue, you never will be good and virtuous. 3. Are your resolutions as firm and your application as vigorous now as when you first set out in the spiritual life? True religion does not consist in fits and starts of devotion. He alone is a good man who perseveres in goodness. Are you as much in earnest now as when your first love to God began to bring forth the fruits of righteousness? As you advance in years, all the passions will gradually cool. You will not feel that degree of ardour in your devotions which you experienced in your early years. But your devotions may continue as sincere, though not so inflamed, as before, and religion may be as effectual as ever in the regulation of your life. 4. Another mark of increasing grace is when you obey the Divine commandments from affection and love. He alone will make progress in the path of the just who is drawn by the cords of love. II. DIRECTIONS HOW TO MAKE FURTHER PROGRESS IN THE PATH OF THE JUST. 1. Make a serious business of a holy life. The true Christian will not be deficient in his attention to the externals of religion; but he will not rest there. We must make a study of the holy life, in order to advance from strength to strength in the ways of the Lord. 2. Never rest satisfied with any degrees of holiness or virtue which you attain. The law of the spiritual life is to aim at perfection. Absolutely perfect we can never become in this life; but we must be always aspiring and endeavouring after perfection. 3. Be always employed in the improvement of your souls. Evil habits may be weakened; inclinations may be counteracted. You may call forth graces that have not yet made their appearance, and bring forward to perfection those that have. 4. Abound in prayer to God for

the assistance of His Holy Spirit. III. EXHORTATION TO A LIFE OF PROGRESSIVE VIRTUE. 1. It is your duty to make progress in the ways of righteousness. You must "abound in the work of the Lord" if you expect your labours to be attended with success. 2. Be assured that you will be successful in the attempt. Here, all who run may obtain. 3. Think of the beauty and the pleasantness of such a progress. These are pleasures that time will not take away. While the animal spirits fail, and the joys which depend upon the liveliness of the passions decline with years, the solid comforts of a holy life, the delights of virtue and a good conscience, will be a new source of happiness in old age, and have a charm for the end of life. 4. Let me exhort you to this progressive state of virtue, from the pleasant consideration that it has no period. There are limits and boundaries set to all human affairs; but in the progress of the mind to intellectual and moral perfection there is no period set. On what you do, on what you now do, all depends. (*John Logan.*)

Progression and perfection :—There are two ideas in the text—progression and perfection. The life of the believer here and there is one. If we have believed, we have everlasting life—we possess already the immortal life which will be perfected in heaven. I. PROGRESSION THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE ON EARTH. Is it a remarkable thing that we should look for the growth of the Divine life in man? Ought we to expect progress in ourselves as Christians? It is a reasonable thing for the parent to look for growth in his child; and he is greatly concerned if he does not discover it. It is a reasonable thing for the farmer to look for growth in the seed which he has scattered upon the prepared soil. It is a reasonable thing that men should expect the sun to shine more and more unto the perfect day. But let us put it to our own hearts whether we have looked for this progress in ourselves. What is God's thought, expressed in His Word, about this progression? Paul's prayer on behalf of the Ephesians, that they might be strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man; that they might be rooted and grounded in love; that they might comprehend more fully the love of Christ; that they might be filled with the fulness of God—certainly implies the possibility and desirability of progression. Then again, the words of the same apostle concerning the same people, that they "be no longer children, . . . but growing up unto Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ;" coming "unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ": these again imply the possibility and desirability of progression. And again, Paul desires for the Colossians that they "be filled with the knowledge of His will unto all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might according to His glorious power unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Shall we not be concerned about our own growth? Shall we not be grieved if we do not grow in our views and feelings in reference to sin? The older we are as the children of God, the longer we have had fellowship with the Pure and Holy One, the more we should hate everything which is sinful. Shall we not be grieved if, as the months go by, we do not find ourselves more decided and resolute and settled in our religious convictions and habits? Shall we not be concerned if we are not gaining greater power over the sin which easily besets us? Shall we not be concerned if we are not more humble, more heavenly-minded, more gentle and forgiving, more Christlike than we were? II. PERFECTION THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IN HEAVEN. Progression here; perfection there. Perfection there according to progression here. Is it so? We think so. If we mistake not, the ordinary notion is—no matter what our life may be here, if only we have faith in Christ, the moment this mortal shall put on immortality we shall be perfect in heaven. We ordinarily think of our perfection there as apart from our progression here. But the teaching of Scripture is not the stagnant pool here becoming the gushing fountain there; it is the well of water here, and there springing up into everlasting life. It is not the babe, or rather the dwarfed child here, appearing there the strong, wise, well-proportioned man; it is the babe growing up here, till there he attains the stature of the perfect man. We know it is very true, though the "well of water" spring up here ever so continuously and copiously, it shall there in comparison gush forth like a fountain of living waters. If we search the Scriptures with this design in view, to discover whether a careless, inactive Christian will attain the same perfection in heaven as a man like the apostle Paul, we shall quickly see that progression here has something to do with perfection there. What glories are these which are set before us! To be without sin; to know as we are known; to love as we are loved; to have ourselves possessed with

the peace of God. Every one of us will reach the perfect day. There will be no imperfection in heaven. Yet those who grow more here shall have larger capabilities there. Those who are the more faithful here shall have the larger range for faithfulness there. Here is something to fill us with joyful anticipation. (*James Neobard.*) *From dawn to noon:*—No nobler expression has ever been given of the great thought of Christian progress than these words contain. But it is not always observed that that thought is presented twice in the text, once in the familiar condensed metaphor of life as a path, and once in the lovely expanded figure which follows. A path leads some whither; and the travellers on it are marching in a definite direction. Then, if we turn to the other emblem of our text, the idea is even more completely carried out in the original than our translation would suggest to an ordinary reader. For the words rendered “shining light” do really mean “light of dawn,” and those rendered “perfect day” do really mean, literally though clumsily translated, “the steadfast (moment) of the day,” the instant when the sun seems to pause on the meridian, like the tongue of the balance right in the centre, and inclining to neither side. I. SO LET ME ASK YOU TO LOOK, FIRST, AT THE GREAT POSSIBILITY OPENED HERE FOR US ALL. Now, it is true that every life, of whatever kind, tends to completeness in its own kind; that the good becomes better, and the bad worse. Single actions consolidate into habits, just as the minute grains of sand, beneath the pressure of the ocean, are hardened into rock. Convictions acted on are strengthened. Light stands as the emblem of three things—knowledge, purity, and joy. The Christian life is capable of continual increase in all three. 1. It is capable of continual increase in knowledge. Of course, I do not mean merely the intellectual apprehension of certain propositions which are received as true. We know a book or a science or a thought in one way; we know a person in another; and Christian knowledge is the knowledge of God in Christ, and of Christ in God. That knowledge is something a great deal more warm-blooded and full-pulsed than an intellectual perception of the truth of a statement. And it is this knowledge which it is intended should grow unceasingly in Christian experience, and in our daily life. We have an infinite object on whom to fix our minds and hearts. A man begins to be a Christian when perhaps through many a cloud, and with many hesitations and doubts, and with a very inadequate apprehension of the truth that he is receiving and the Person that he is grasping, his faith puts out an empty hand, and lays hold of Christ as his hope and his all. But as his days go on, if he be truly in possession of that initial truth, he will find that it opens out into splendours, and discloses depths and assumes a power controlling all life and thought, which he never dreamt of when he first apprehended it. We begin, like gold-seekers, with surface-washings; we end with crushing quartz. We begin on the edge of the great continent, we travel onwards and inwards, through all the leagues of its mountains and plains and lakes, and we never shall traverse it altogether. Life interprets Christ, if we let Christ interpret life. When the night of sorrow closes in over our heads, there are truths that shine out bright and starry, like the light points in a keen, frosty winter's night, which never could be seen in the garish day. 2. Again, the Christian life is capable of a perpetual increase in purity. And if a man be truly a Christian, there is nothing more certain than that, day by day, his conscience will become more sensitive and quick to discriminate between good and evil. The more we rise in the moral scale, the more solemn, sovereign, and far reaching we discern the commandment to be, that we shall be like our Lord. Depend upon it, all of us have things in our characters, and acts in our daily ordering of our lives, which, if we had advanced further along the path, we should avoid as a pestilence. 3. Again, the Christian life is capable of a continual increase in gladness. Yes! “As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” All other kinds of gladness fade, and all other sources pass away. But Jesus Christ's gladness, as He said Himself, is given to us that our “joy may be full,” because His joy remains in us. Time takes the gloss off most things. It does not take the brightness out of the Christian life. II. LET US MARK THE FREQUENT FAILURE TO REALISE THIS POSSIBILITY. What I have been saying must sound to many of us liker irony than a description of fact, when we turn our eyes from the possibility for which provision is made by the gift of an infinite Christ, and an infinite Spirit, to the facts of Christian experience as we see them lying round us. Progress! Stagnation is the truth about hosts of us. A path! Well, it is a circular path if it is a path at all. They mark time, as the soldiers say, one foot up and the other down, but the feet are always planted in the same place. Sure I am that in a tragically large number of cases a professing Christian's early days are his best. Many of us

seem to have gone to school to the Japanese gardeners, that will take you an oak, and stick it into a flower-pot, and stunt it there, so that it is warranted never to break the flower-pot, and never to grow an inch. There is another kind of opposite to that steady increase in brightness only too common amongst us, and that is—spasmodic growth by fits and starts; brief summer followed by a dreary winter, and no continuous and steadfast advance. III. LASTLY, LET ME ASK YOU TO CONSIDER THE CURE OF THE FAILURE, AND THE WAY OF REALISING THE POSSIBILITY. What made a man who is a Christian in reality light at first? The apostle tells us, "Now are ye light in the Lord." The reason why so many Christian people do not grow is because there is no depth and reality of union between them and Jesus Christ; and there is no depth or reality of union between them and Jesus Christ because they have no strength of faith. It is not merely for getting escape from some hell, or forgiveness for sins, that that faith is essential, but it is needful that there may be flowing into our hearts that which will change our darkness into radiance of light. Take a lesson from your electric lights. The instant that you break the contact, that instant the flame disappears. The first requisite, then, is to keep up our union with Christ, and that is done by thinking about Him, by the occupation of mind and heart with Him. And the second requisite is, to bring all our life under the influence of Christ's truth, and to bring all Christ's truth to bear upon our life. And then, and then, we shall be "as the sun shineth in his strength." (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Character and destiny of the just:—There are three methods of using natural facts as moral illustrations. 1. The poetic: which employs facts according to their impressions on the senses. 2. The scientific: which employs facts according to their best ascertained laws, with respect to sensible impressions. 3. The composite: which unites the poetic and scientific; applying facts in accordance both with the laws that govern them and the manifestations which accompany them. The poetic method is generally employed in the Bible. The scientific method would have required a scientific revelation, and the time for this had not yet come. The text is an example of poetic illustration. I. THE CHARACTER OF THE JUST. It is distinguished by these two facts—1. Its elements are pure and complete. They are matters of intellect, sentiment, propensity, conscience, and will. The intellect of the just man is always thoughtful of moral principles. The sentiments of the just man admire moral principles. He sees that they sustain self-respect, and claim, rightly, the respect of the community. The propensities of the just man cling to moral principles. As thought excites admiration, so admiration excites love. The conscience of the just man is responsive to moral principles. Its instant intuitions of virtue and vice, and its instinctive excitements, consequent upon these intuitions, aid the intellect in its studies, encourage the sentiments in their admiration, and confirm the propensities in their attachment. Not vain, however, of its natural sagacity, it acknowledges the necessity and superiority of revelation, and corrects its own errors by the infallible decisions of the Word of God. The will is faithful to moral principles. This is his grandest distinction. 2. These elements are well proportioned in their combination, in the character of the just. What is wanted is a balance of powers: all the faculties and principles in equal and harmonious action. The elements of character in the just man are pure, complete, and well-proportioned. II. THE DESTINY OF THE JUST. What are the distinctions of the sun's path? 1. It is a high path. Far too high for any earthly obstruction. 2. It is a radiant path. It is glorious because it is radiant. The glory of the just is from within. It is a radiation. 3. It is a triumphant path. 4. It is a benignant path. (T. H. Stockton.)

The path of the just:—I. The path of the just resembles the shining light in being PRECEDED BY A STATE OF DARKNESS (Eph. v. 8). The darkness of ignorance gives way to spiritual knowledge. The darkness of depravity gives way to the light of grace (1 Pet. ii. 9). II. The path of the just resembles the shining light in being SMALL AT ITS COMMENCEMENT. There is little light in the understanding, little warmth in the affections, little tenderness in the conscience, little submission or devotedness in the will. III. The path of the just resembles the shining light in its PROGRESSIVE CHARACTER. Sanctification is a work which, beginning in conversion, is carried on gradually. And where there is true grace in the heart, there is a desire and a capability of greater perfection, just as in the seed there is an ability and tendency to vegetate and spring up into a plant or a tree. The pleasure, too, felt in the way of righteousness, naturally leads a man to aim at greater attainments. IV. The path of the just resembles the shining light in AT LENGTH REACHING TO THE PERFECT DAY. (Jas. Kirkwood, M.A.) The path of the just:—

I. THE JUST. II. THEIR PATH. 1. Of penitence. 2. Of prayer. 3. Of self-denial. 4. Of humility. 5. Of struggling, yet of peace. 6. Of weakness and strength. III. PERFECT DAY. 1. Possessors (Rev. viii. 13, 14). 2. Of full revelation. (1) Of God's glory. (2) Of the saints' reflection. IV. THE CROWN OF LIFE. Certainty in truth, pardon, joy, peace. (*Henry Bennett.*) *The advantages of a religious life*:—I. THE CERTAINTY AND EVIDENCE AFFORDED BY A RELIGIOUS LIFE. Its subject is sure that it is the path of God's commandment. He sees that it is the path of life. II. THE BEAUTY AND EXCELLENCE OF A HOLY LIFE. III. THE PLEASANTNESS OF A HOLY LIFE. 1. Pleasures of action. 2. Pleasures of reflection. 3. Pleasures of hope. IV. ITS INSTRUCTIVENESS. V. ITS PROGRESSIVE NATURE. The good man improves—1. In knowledge of Divine things. 2. In the adhesion of his will to Divine things. 3. In the perfection of his example. 4. In the ease and pleasure of well-doing. VI. IT WILL AT LAST ISSUE IN CONSUMMATE PERFECTION—a perfection of holiness and happiness. (*H. Grove.*) *Marks of the Christian's progress towards the perfection of heaven*:—I. HIS KNOWLEDGE IS GRADUALLY INCREASING. It must be very evident, that the more a heaven-taught man devotes himself to serious meditation, that he will obtain clearer views of the subtle and disguised workings of corruption—he will be more thoroughly satisfied of the desperate alienation of the human heart from God. He will, accordingly, be conducted to a more profound view of the value and importance of that work which was finished at Calvary, to a more unreserved renunciation of every claim to Divine favour on the ground of his own good works, and to a more heartfelt conviction that he must be justified by faith alone. II. HIS HUMILITY IS DEEPENING. The knowledge of his unworthiness prostrates him who is enlightened. As the genius who has arrived at the highest proficiency in any art or science finds it hardest to please himself with his own work, and sees best the inferiority of his attainments to the standard of perfection, so the saint who entertains the loftiest views of the holy character of God will form the most lowly estimate of his own strength and performances. III. HIS DESIRE AND ALACRITY TO DO THE WILL OF GOD ARE BECOMING MORE ARDENT. This is the result of all that he knows of the Sovereign of the Universe, since He delights in righteousness. This is the natural result of the unreserved admission of gospel truth into the mind, since those who believe in God must be careful to maintain good works. IV. HIS AFFECTION FOR THE THINGS OF TIME IS DIMINISHING. Where the treasure is, there will the heart be also. As any body rises above the ground, up into the regions of space, that which philosophers call the attraction of gravitation affects it less and less; and if it could be elevated sufficiently, the earth would at length lose its power over it altogether, and it would be drawn away towards some other planet. This explains, in the way of illustration, the process which takes place with respect to the human soul. V. BY HIS INCREASING LOVE FOR GOD AND HIS PEOPLE, HE EVINCES HIS PROGRESSIVE MEETNESS FOR THAT HEAVEN WHICH IS LOVE. (*David Strong.*) *Christian progress*:—In mountain climbing the traveller is not conscious of getting nearer to heaven, only of getting farther from earth. The sun and the stars are no nearer, but the houses and the fields are more distant. So is it in the Divine life. We may not grow consciously meet for heaven, and are apt to deplore our want of progress. But the fact may be that we have been advancing and ascending, and that now we have a higher standard whereby we judge ourselves. If we look back, one thing we are certain of, that the world has less charm for us and less hold upon us. But farther from earth is nearer heaven. (*J. Halsey.*) *Grace perfected*:—It is the nature of all the works of God's creation to seek, and to go on to, their perfection. The first dawn of morn continues to increase until it shines in the noontide radiance. The feeble plant which is just breaking the clod continues to grow until in the course of years it stands a flourishing and a stately tree. In the animal kingdom we see God's creatures gradually emerging from the weakness and insignificance of infancy, and rising, where no obstructions exist, into the vigour and maturity of age. And shall the light go on to perfection, the plant and the flower to blossom, the tree to bring forth its fruit; and all God's creatures grow up and flourish each in its own perfection, and grace—the immortal plant of grace—this little tree of the Lord's own planting—shall this alone be denied the benefits of God's universal law? No! grace has its destined perfection. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Ver. 19. The way of the wicked is as darkness: they know not at what they stumble.—*The blindness of sinners their destruction*:—All men are either saints or

sinners; and they are all walking in paths as different as the characters they sustain. The text indicates that sinners are in such darkness that they are **insensible of the objects** which are leading them to ruin. I. THE DARKNESS IN WHICH SINNERS ARE INVOLVED. It cannot be owing to any deficiency in their natural powers, nor to any want of intellectual information. The darkness is moral darkness; it lies not in their understandings, but in their hearts. Moral depravity always produces moral blindness. While sinners remain under the entire dominion of a wicked heart, they are altogether blind to the moral beauty of the character, of the works, of the providence of God. II. SINNERS ARE INSENSIBLE OF THE OBJECTS OVER WHICH THEY ARE STUMBLING AND FALLING. Spiritual blindness is the same in all sinners, at all times; and has the same dangerous and destructive tendency. 1. They are insensible that they stumble at the great deceiver. 2. They are not sensible that they are stumbling at one another. 3. That they stumble at Divine providence. 4. That their common employments are dangerous objects, over which they are stumbling and falling. 5. They are no less blind to the nature and tendency of their religious performances. 6. The moral blindness of sinners insensibly leads them to stumble at the preaching they hear. 7. They are blind to the blindness of their own hearts, which are insensibly leading them to blackness and darkness for ever. Improvement—1. If sinners are so blind and insensible to the dangerous objects with which they are surrounded, and over which they are stumbling, it is not strange, that they generally live so securely and joyfully. 2. If all sinners are involved in such moral darkness as makes them insensible of their dangerous and perishing condition, then it is not strange that they are so displeased at having their danger clearly pointed out. 3. If sinners are blind to the objects which are insensibly leading them to destruction, then they are in extreme danger of being finally lost. All things conspire to destroy them, because they abuse all things with which they are connected and concerned. 4. If sinners are constantly growing blinder and blinder, and more insensible of the things which are leading them to ruin, then they are entirely in the sovereign hand of God, who may save or destroy them, according to His holy and righteous pleasure. 5. It is owing to the distinguishing and astonishing grace of God that any are saved. 6. Inquire whether sinners have ever been made the subjects of God's special grace. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The obscurity and uncertainty of the way of the wicked:—*1. We will consider the man who admits the principles of religion in speculation, but contradicts them in practice. His way is darkness. Light, indeed, has come to him; but he loves darkness rather than light. He is not guided by the dictates of reason, or the precepts of revelation; but pursues a course in direct opposition to both. He never knows what course he shall next pursue; for he cannot tell what the next impulse will be—what gust of passion will take him, or what wind of temptation will drive him away. 2. Let us consider the hypocrite, who, without integrity of heart, assumes the external form of religion. His way is dark and slippery. He believes that there is such a thing as religion, and that it is a matter in which he is really concerned. He views a future state as certain, and preparation for it as immediately important. His heart is, indeed, full of love to this world; but, since he must leave it, he wishes to have a good hope in the view of another. He is sure he should enjoy himself and his earthly treasures much better if he could only free his mind from this painful bondage to the fear of death—this troublesome apprehension of the wrath to come. He applies himself to obtain that tranquil state which seems so desirable. He has no more love to religion than he used to have. Terror only has awakened him from his guilty slumbers. It is not the temper of godliness, it is only the pleasure of a good hope, which is the immediate object of his desire. He gains his hope by self-deception, and maintains it by self-flattery. 3. To consider the wicked man in another point of view; as believing the great truths of natural religion, but discarding revelation. His way is covered with darkness. He has no light to direct his eye or guide his steps. With respect to the nature, condition, and means of future happiness, an awful uncertainty attends him. There is no ground on which his faith can stand; no support on which his hope can lean. 4. There is another view which we are to take of the wicked. We will consider them as renouncing the great principles of natural religion, the existence and government of God, moral obligation, and a future retribution. There are some such infidels as these; but their way is covered with darkness, more gloomy and dismal than that which involves the path of other transgressors. What peace and satisfaction can a mortal feel without a persuasion

that there is a wise, just, and good Being, who made and governs the world, and that this Being is his friend? With this persuasion he may possess a cheerful serenity amidst all the vicissitudes of life; for to the virtuous God is a present help in trouble, and all things will He turn to their advantage. (*J. Lathrop, D.D.*) *The way of the wicked*:—There is a castle on the Lake of Geneva which stands upon a rock, and the lake is underneath. In the old, cruel days great atrocities were perpetrated there, and one was this: There is a shaft from that prison to the lake. Looking down it, you see the water glittering far away below. In those days they used to plant in that shaft spikes or sharp knives. Then they came in the darkness, and, opening the door, whispered to the prisoners, "Three steps and liberty." And the poor prisoner took his leap in the dark—as he thought, to liberty; but he fell amongst these knives, and in a few moments dropped, a bleeding corpse, into the lake below. Yes; three steps and liberty—to be cut up, and drop, a mangled body, into the abyss. I tell you that is like the liberty of sin. A man who fancies he is going to live after his passions takes a leap in the dark, and, pierced through with many sorrows, drops into the gulf of darkness. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 20-22. **My son, attend to my words.**—*Divine principles*:—"The words of wisdom" are the vehicles of those Divine principles the reception and embodiment of which by man are essential to his well-being. I. **THE METHOD OF GAINING THEM.** 1. There must be the attentive ear. 2. There must be the steadfast look. 3. There must be the enshrining heart. II. **THE BLESSEDNESS OF HAVING THEM.** 1. They are life to those who find them; they are the soul-quickeners. 2. They are health. Life without health is scarcely worth living. These principles not only give life to the soul, but they also supply the nutriment and stimulate the activities that ensure health—health of all kinds. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Call to attention*:—The motives that call for our attention are exceedingly powerful. It is a father that speaks. The things which are spoken are of quickening and invigorating virtue. They are life to such as find them, and health not only to the soul, but to the body; not to a particular part of it, but to all flesh. A medicine effectual to the cure of a single member might soon enrich the inventor of it. Here is a medicine for all the flesh, and yet the physician that prescribes it without reward finds so few willing to make use of it that he must proclaim its virtues again and again. Here is a physician of infinite value; attend to the directions which he gives for the management of our whole life. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 23. **Keep thy heart with all diligence.**—*Heart-keeping*:—The great defect in our system of education is that it turns a man away from himself. Many a schoolboy can describe the continents and islands of the earth, trace out the intricacies of the planetary system, naming suns and moons and stars, who would stand abashed should you ask him the number of bones in the human body, or to trace out the marvellous nervous system that God has given him. Now, Christianity turns man's attention to himself. No other teacher ever equalled Christ in this respect. I. **THE HEART.** If we ask why the heart is chosen rather than the understanding, the judgment, or memory, we find our answer in the fact that the understanding may be always subject to circumstances, or may be enfeebled by disease; the judgment may be in error, and the memory may fail. There are three reasons why the heart is chosen. 1. A pathological; it is the fountain of life, through which the blood passes, to be distributed to every part of the system. Stop the heart, and death follows. 2. The heart is the region of sensibility. When the great passions of hope and fear, of love and hate, of joy and sorrow, take hold of a man, he realises the sensation in the region of the heart. 3. The intellect is controlled by the heart more than the heart by the intellect. Men do not follow their thoughts, but their feelings, yet there are teachers proclaiming a religion of pure intellect, excluding the passions or feelings of the soul. *Christianity appeals to the emotions.* II. **THE KEEPING.** We are not to destroy our appetites and passions, but to keep them in subordination: keeping the heart is not murdering it. Vigilance is the price of everything good and great in earth or heaven. Nothing but unceasing watchfulness can keep the heart in harmony with God's heart. (*Christian Age.*) *Supremely good advice*:—I. **SOME OF THOSE WEIGHTY CONSIDERATIONS UPON WHICH THE ADVICE IS FOUNDED.** 1. The heart is the source of all human conduct. The greatest and basest actions of men did once exist as a simple and insignificant thought. The sallings forth of purpose might easily have been checked at the gate of the citadel, whereas, when once beyond con-

trol, the consequences might prove such as we never ventured to anticipate. 2. Every man is that really which he is in his heart. Conduct is not always a trustworthy basis of estimate. The heart imparts a tinge and character to those streams which issue from it. 3. Scripture represents the heart of man as not in a trustworthy condition, and therefore the more to be diligently kept and guarded. 4. The fact that out of the heart come the "issues of life" adds to the importance of this counsel. What is meant is the issues of our future never-ending existence. II. POINT OUT IN WHAT WAY THIS DUTY MAY BE BEST PERFORMED. 1. Watch narrowly the course and current of our thoughts and affections. 2. Check them at once, when we discover them to have taken a wrong course. 3. Exercise the mind as much as possible with holy and heavenly themes. 4. Earnestly call down the aid and blessing of the Holy Spirit. (*Essex Congregational Remembrancer.*) *The government of the thoughts* :—Keep a strict guard over the workings of your mind, your thoughts, and inclinations; for your life and conversation will be conformable to the main current of your thoughts and desires. The soul is ever busy and at work. There is no pause, no suspension of thought, at least while we are awake. Think we must, but what to think is the question. I. HOW FAR MAY WE HAVE A COMMAND OVER OUR THOUGHTS? 1. It is impossible to hinder irregular, fantastic, evil thoughts from rising up in our minds. But we may choose whether we will cultivate a familiarity with them. 2. It is not in our power to prevent distractions even in our religious addresses to God. While the soul is immersed in matter, it will sometimes fly off in airy wanderings, or flag into a supine heaviness. This is our frailty or misfortune, but will not be imputed to us as a sin, provided we strive against it. 3. Our thoughts are not absolutely free, just after we have received some considerable loss or disaster. But we must not give up our mind as a prey to melancholy, and wilfully indulge our sorrows. 4. Angry thoughts have to be taken into consideration; the passion of anger; the first starts or sallies of this passion; the deliberate and settled consent of the will to it. We are invested with the power to withhold the determinate consent of the will to these primary motions. We may counterbalance one passion by another, and may turn their artillery upon themselves. We may call in our fear to subdue our anger. So far as our thoughts are involuntary, so far they are not sinful. The mind is passive in receiving its notices of things, whether pure or impure; but it is active in its determination, whether to harbour or discard them. So far as it is active it is accountable. It is active when we dwell upon impure thoughts with complacency. We can suspend our judgment. Our mature examination is the consulting of the guide; the determination of the will thereupon is the following of that guide. We may habituate ourselves to the contemplation of the greatest good, and then lesser delights will shine with a diminished lustre. II. SOME RULES FOR THE CONDUCT OF OUR THOUGHTS. 1. We must not go too much into light amusements. The mind fixed on trifles is disabled and indisposed for greater and more important business. 2. We must avoid the reading of bad books. 3. Call in other ideas to your aid as soon as ever any passion begins to ferment. When we observe in ourselves the least approaches towards anger, lust, envy, and discontent, we should seek God's assistance, and pray for the succours of His Holy Spirit. 4. We must often descend into ourselves. 5. Much may be done by the pursuit of knowledge. The more variety of knowledge the mind is enriched with, the more channels there will be to divert our minds into. (*J. Seed, M.A.*) *The heart, and the issues of life* :—In its elements and outward scenery nature is the same to all. Light and night, sun and stars, air and earth and landscapes, offer a common enclosure and background to our existence. But the various impulses and aptitudes for work with which we are born—which press from the very core of our being—diversify the world as widely as if we were distributed upon different globes. To one set of men it is a place to think and learn and grow wise in. Another finds the world a place to work in. Others find it a garden of beauty in which the stars are more valuable as blossoms of poetic light than for their astronomic truth, and the air richer for its hues than for its uses, and the mountains grander for their millinery of mist and shadow and their draperies of verdure and snow than for their service to the climates and housekeeping of nations. Still others see the world as a place to trade in and grow rich—a gorge between gold mountains, where they must quarry. Or it is a pleasure-ground for giddy or elegant enjoyment. It is plain, therefore, that our natural bent in the line of work does a great deal to impress a character upon the universe. Even when no moral quality is involved, we see how life gets coined at our mint, so that the world, God's world, somehow wears the stamp of the die cut into our heart. And temperament, natural tempera-

ment, has an effect on life that must be considered in this connection. If a man has a music-box in his heart, the pulse of the sun will seem to beat with it, and the trees to throb and bud with its melody. If his bosom is strung as an Æolian harp, nature will be full of weird and sad cadences. You know how experience, also, interprets the same principle, even in cases where moral considerations are not prominent. You know how a piece of good-fortune brightens the air, how prosperous hours make the globe buoyant, how some impending evil puts the edge of a spiritual eclipse upon the sun as solemnly as the shadow of the moon settles on its burning disc, how suddenly ill-fortune in business will seem to make the very springs of beauty bankrupt, how the sickness of a dear friend turns nature pallid, how the death of wife, husband, or child will convert all the trees to cypress, and set the music of nature in a minor key, as a dirge or requiem. All these facts, which belong rather to the margin of our subject, enforce the duty of "keeping the heart." For though aptitudes, temperaments, and moods have much to do with the tone and quality of our life, states have more. A dark moral state stretches a permanent veil of cloud over the heart, that thins and chills all the light, while a mood or a sorrow may sail only like the swift blackness of a shower through our air. And we can do a great deal to control the moral states of the heart; we are responsible for them. Moral evils, such as envy, avarice, selfishness, license, only vivify with various colouring the one fundamental evil, sin—distance from sympathy with God, alienation from the heavenly Father, indifference or disloyalty to His will and love. This is our central foe. This is what corrupts the issues of life. This is the serpent at the fountain. Back of all sins is sin. The one comprehensive purpose of life is to bring Infinite grace to bear on that, and drive it from the inmost artery of the soul. The first thing to do, in order that such life may issue from your heart, is to get your heart broken. Not because it is totally corrupt, but because it is not centrally dedicated—because God is not invited and admitted to the inner shrine, to rule thence with His wisdom and purity, so that you shall consciously live for Him. This world, with its hard conditions and mysteries, is built for an upper and nether millstone to grind pride out of human hearts, to crush their natural state, so that, in penitence and humility, God may come into the spirit, and the world seem remade because the soul is regenerate in consecration and the beginning of a filial life. You are to keep your heart with all diligence, by desiring and praying for this spirit of sympathy with God and allegiance to Him. And you are also to "keep" it by living in fellowship with great truths and sentiments. If you have had any seasons or season when you have seen the value and blessedness of a religious conception of the universe and of religious principle, honour that; honour your soul's own witness to sacred realities, by trying to keep in the society of those noble truths and ideas. (*T. Starr King.*) *Keeping the heart with diligence*:—I. *SOME OF OUR HEARTS ARE NOT WORTH KEEPING.* Addressing some unconverted men, I say, "The sooner you get a new heart the better." God is very plain in telling us no good can come out of these corrupt, degenerate hearts that we all have by nature. II. *INASMUCH AS OUT OF THE HEART "ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE," IT IS IMPORTANT TO KEEP THE RESERVOIR FULL.* It is bad enough to have an empty head, but an empty heart is worse still. For, other things being equal, a man's force in the world is just in proportion to the fulness of his heart. Heart is power. We all want more heart in our Master's service. III. *STRIVE WITH ALL DILIGENCE TO KEEP THE HEART PURE.* A full reservoir is not enough—the water must be clean. A foul reservoir means spreading the seeds of pestilence and death. If the heart be not pure, the thoughts will not be pure, nor the conversation, nor the life. A scrupulous conscience and thorough transparency of character are all-important. IV. *KEEP YOUR HEART TRANQUIL.* Seek to have a soul calm and peaceful, and at rest. The state of the heart has far more to do with one's comfort, and prosperity, and success, than most people imagine. From your heart, as from a clear mountain spring, there shall issue influences of health and benediction, to gladden your own lives and to bless all around you. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *Keeping the heart*:—Either keep thy heart with all sorts and degrees of care and diligence, or keep thy heart as thy most precious thing. 1. Mark or attend unto, inquire into and study the heart. 2. The governance and good management of our hearts, keeping all the motions thereof in due order, within fit compass, applying them to good, and restraining them from bad things. 3. Or preserving, guarding, securing from mischief or damage. It is a peculiar excellency of human nature that man can reflect on all that is done within him, can discern the tendencies of his soul, is acquainted with

his own purposes. It is, therefore, his work to regulate as well the internal workings of his soul as his external actions, to settle his thoughts on due objects, to bend his inclinations into a right frame, to constrain his affections within due bounds, to ground his purposes on honest reasons, and direct them unto lawful matters. It is our duty to be looking inward on ourselves, observing what thoughts spring up within us; what imaginations find most welcome harbour in our breasts, what prejudices possess our minds, &c. Thus we may arrive at a competent knowledge of ourselves. This preserves from self-conceit; disposes to equanimity; qualifies our opinion of others; makes wise and prudent; helps to reforming our lives and regulating our devotions, and enables us properly to govern our hearts. (I. Barrow, D.D.) *The keeping of the heart a practicable and important duty:—*

I. WHAT IS IT TO KEEP THE HEART? It evidently needs to be kept. It is prone to go astray. 1. The heart is to be kept from all improper objects; every object which has no proper connection with present duty. 2. The heart is to be guarded against all improper affections. When placed upon proper objects, the heart may have very improper affections towards them. **II. SHOW HOW THE HEART IS KEPT.** 1. Men should always attend to those subjects only with which they are properly concerned. 2. Men must pursue the same method to keep their hearts from improper affections, as from improper objects. They must, therefore, exercise good affections. Love will exclude hatred; faith will exclude unbelief; repentance will exclude impenitence; submission will exclude opposition; humility will exclude pride. Any gracious exercise will exclude any sinful one: only by the exercise of holiness can the heart be kept from sin. **III. THE IMPORTANCE OF MEN'S KEEPING THEIR HEARTS WITH THE GREATEST CARE AND CONSTANCY.** 1. While they neglect to keep their hearts, all their moral exercises will be sinful. Those who neglect to keep their hearts live in the continual exercise of selfish and sinful affections. 2. While men neglect to keep their hearts, all their thoughts will be sinful. Though bare thoughts have no moral good or evil in themselves considered, yet in connection with the heart they all acquire a good or bad moral quality. No thought is indifferent after the heart has been exercised about it. 3. While men neglect to keep their hearts, all their words will be sinful. Men never speak but of choice, so that their hearts are concerned in all their vain or serious conversation. 4. While men neglect to keep their hearts, all their intentions, purposes, or designs will be evil. Every evil design is first formed in the heart of the projector. 5. Let men pursue what employment they will, whether public or private, high or low, civil or religious, their daily business will become their daily sin, unless they keep their hearts with all diligence. 6. Men must keep their hearts lest they abuse all the blessings of providence with which they are favoured, and all the troubles and afflictions which they are called to suffer. **Improvement—**1. Men are never under a natural necessity of sinning. 2. Since men can guard their hearts against evil, they can guard them also against good. 3. Those who neglect the duty enjoined in the text are in imminent danger. 4. None can be sincere in religion who entirely neglect to keep their hearts. 5. The Christian warfare consists in watching, guarding, and keeping the heart. 6. It is both important and helpful diligently to attend the means of grace. (N. Emmons, D.D.) *On keeping the heart:—***I. THE DUTY ENJOINED.** We must keep the whole heart in—1. A state of holy watchfulness. 2. A state of continued devotion. 3. A state of joy and confidence. 4. A state of lively activity. 5. A state of preparedness for death and eternity. **II. THE MODE OF PERFORMING IT SPECIFIED.** 1. Under all circumstances. 2. In all places. 3. At all times. 4. With all intensity of solicitude. **III. THE MOTIVE DESIGNED.** 1. Thoughts are formed there. 2. Purposes are planned there. 3. Words originate there. 4. Actions proceed from thence. **Learn—**1. The means of spiritual safety: preservation of the heart. 2. The importance of this exercise. All depends upon it. 3. The necessity of cleaving to God with purpose of heart. 4. Urge sinners without delay to believe the gospel and give their hearts to the Lord. (J. Burns, D.D.) *On the government of the heart:—*Men are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. The wise man advises us to attend to our thoughts and desires. The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery. **I. THE STATE OF THE HEART DETERMINES OUR MORAL CHARACTER.** The tenor of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs,

it will draw the practice after it. Independent of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. In the eye of the Supreme Being, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform as the motive which moves us to performance that constitutes us good or evil in His sight. The rectification of our principles of action is the primary object of religious discipline. The regeneration of the heart is everywhere represented in the gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

II. THE STATE OF THE HEART FORMS OUR PRINCIPAL HAPPINESS OR MISERY. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, it must be our first study to rectify inward disorders. Whatever discipline tends to accomplish this purpose is of greater importance to man than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance in watching over it. The human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependence on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole.

III. IN WHAT DOES THE GOVERNMENT CONSIST? 1. The thoughts are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. Many regard thought as exempted from all control. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination appears to them the native right and privilege of man. To the Supreme Being thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as actions. The moral regulation of our thoughts is the particular test of our reverence for God. Thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. But how far are thoughts subject to the command of our will? They are not always the offspring of choice. Vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. Allowing for this, there is still much scope for the government of our thoughts. As—(1) When the introduction of any train of thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act. (2) When thoughts are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Study to acquire the habit of attention to thought; acquire the power of fixing your minds, and of restraining their irregular motions. Guard against idleness, which is the great fomentor of all corruptions in the human heart; it is the parent of loose imaginations and inordinate desires. Provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. When criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Impress your minds with an habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. 2. Passions are strong emotions, occasioned by the view of apprehending good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature; and therefore to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires us to moderate and rule them. Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They are the active forces of the soul. It is the present infelicity of human nature that the strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle that ought to rule them. Two principles may be assumed. (1) That through the present weakness of our understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects. (2) That even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess; they always hurry us towards their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. To govern our passions, we must ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit, and restrain them in that pursuit, when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. To obtain command of passion is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. To obtain it we must—1. Study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. 2. Gain the power of self-denial; which consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to sacrificing, for the sake of duty or conscience, or from a view to some higher or more extensive good. 3. Impress your minds with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be, when you are under the power of passion. 4. Oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. 5. The excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. 6. To our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Lastly, the government of the temper is included in "keeping the heart." Temper is the disposition which remains after the emotions are past, and which forms the habitual prosperity of the soul. The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation

which he bears. (1) With respect to God, the good man ought to cultivate a devout temper. (2) Point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. A peaceable, candid, kind, generous, sympathising temper. (3) The proper state of temper as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all good dispositions is humility. Hence will naturally arise a contented temper; and from this will spring a cheerful one. To the establishment of this happy temper, the due regulation of the thoughts and government of the temper naturally conduce, and in this they ought to issue. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The government of the passions*:—I. WHEN DO OUR PASSIONS BECOME CULPABLE? A sect of ancient philosophers condemned all emotion, held every passion to be culpable, because inconsistent with that serenity of temper, that equal tranquillity of mind, which they thought should ever be preserved. We cannot, however, lay aside our innate dispositions, and with equal indifference meet health or sickness, pleasure or pain. The Stoical doctrine is better calculated for heaven than earth. The passions and affections were all originally designed to have either our own personal good or the good of others for their object, though they are too generally misapplied by our corruption, and degenerate into vices. Our rational and moral powers ought always to have dominion over the inferior principles of our nature. We all stand accountable for the use of our reason, and where reason points out to us good and evil, if we choose the latter, we doubtless appear guilty in the eye of our heavenly Judge. If we cannot wholly extirpate or subdue our passions, yet to subjugate them to government is not only the duty, but the proper and most important employment, of a rational being. II. OUR HAPPINESS HERE, AS WELL AS HEREAFTER, IS DETERMINED BY THE CONDUCT OF OUR PASSIONS. When they are duly regulated, and act under the guidance and direction of reason, we may promise ourselves all the happiness that our station, or other circumstances of life, will admit. They who are at no pains to discipline and govern their passions, but, disregarding right and wrong, indiscriminately follow whithersoever inclination points the way, may find some pleasure in such pursuits, but none that can compensate for the loss of those interior satisfactions, as well as exterior advantages, that naturally result from a wise and virtuous conduct. III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THIS SELF-GOVERNMENT MAY BE ATTAINED. Consideration, or a right use of reason, is our only remedy. We must often retire into ourselves, and in some calm hour of reflection review the state of the heart. Passions, however strong and vigorous by nature, may be checked in their growth by timely care and prudent opposition. Let us accustom ourselves to deliberate before we act. We should observe, with a watchful eye, all our passions, desires, and affections; keep a constant guard on every avenue to the heart, and be careful to oppose the admittance of any wrong inclination. In order to succeed in this arduous and important work, let us, to our own efforts, add our supplications to Him who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men. (*G. Carr, B.A.*) *Governing our own thoughts*:—I. WHAT POWER A MAN HATH OVER HIS OWN THOUGHTS! Some men, by the very principles of their make and constitution, are much better able to govern their thoughts than others. Some that are naturally weaker, have, by long use and many trials, obtained a greater power over their thoughts than others. All have a greater power over the motions of their minds at some times than at others. 1. The first motions of our minds are very little, if at all, in our power. We cannot help suggestions coming to us. 2. When a man's mind is vigorously affected and possessed, either with the outward objects of sense, or with inward passions of any kind, in that case he hath little or no command of his thoughts. 3. A man's thoughts are sometimes in a manner forced upon him, from the present temper and indisposition of his body. 4. We have liberty of thinking, and may choose our own thoughts. It is in our power to determine what suggestions we will fix our minds upon. 5. It is always in our power to assent to our thoughts, or to deny our consent to them. Here the morality of our thoughts begins. No man is drawn to commit sin by any state or condition that God hath put him into, nor by any temptation, either outward or inward, that is presented to him. Our sin begins when we yield to the temptation. The sin becomes great as it grows into action. II. THE ART OF GOVERNING OUR THOUGHTS. 1. We must rightly pitch our main designs, and choose that for the great business of our lives that really ought to be so. 2. We must avoid two things, viz., idleness and loose company. 3. We must be as attentive as possible to the first motions of our minds; so that when we find them tending towards something that is forbidden, we may stop them at once. 4. There are some particular exercises which would prove helpful. Converse with discreet and pious persons; reading good books, and

especially the Bible; taking times for meditation; and fervent and constant prayer to God. 5. With our diligence we must join discretion. We must have a care not to "intend" our thoughts immoderately, and more than our tempers will bear, even to the best things. We must so keep our hearts as at the same time to keep our health and the vigour of our minds. As long as we consist of bodies and souls, we cannot always be thinking of serious things. (*Archbp. John Sharp.*)

The keeping of the heart:—I. THE SUGGESTIVE SAYING, "Out of (the heart) are the issues of life." 1. All our words and actions originate there. "All these evil things come from within, and they defile the man." 2. The moral quality of every word and action depends on its inner motive. 3. Thoughts and feelings themselves, apart from actions, are all either good or evil. "The thought of foolishness is sin." 4. Within the heart is formed that "character" which determines most of the actions of the man. We give the name "character" to that complex collection of tendencies and habits which grows up within us all as the sum and result of individual acts continually repeated. The germs of the ultimate character can often be detected in the child. 5. The "issues of life," in outward condition, depend most of all on the heart within us. 6. The everlasting "issues of life" come "out of the heart."

II. TAKE UP THE ADMONITION, "Keep thy heart with all diligence." The margin reads, "Keep thy heart above all keeping." The common estimate of the relative value of the outside and the inside is terribly astray. It creeps into our very religion. 1. We can avoid the evil. 2. We can fill up the heart with good. (*F. H. Marling.*)

On keeping the heart:—I. THE DUTY HERE ENJOINED. The heart is the seat of the thoughts, the will, and the affections. The avenues which lead to this habitation are the senses, through which a great variety of objects are ever soliciting admission. By the original frame of our nature, there was also another way of admission into the heart, viz., faith. Over these was placed the judgment, as a faithful sentinel, to direct the will. Scarcely, however, had this happy constitution of our nature existed when, the judgment being perverted, the will was induced to make a wrong choice. Upon this great revolution in our nature, sensible objects began to occupy our chief attention. They tend to produce the utmost irregularity in the affections, and to banish God, and heaven, and eternity, from the mind. To keep the heart while in this state, would only be to shut up the enemy within the walls. The enemy must be ejected. This God promises to do. To keep the heart with all diligence is to set a constant guard on every avenue which leads to it. It is to exercise the strictest vigilance over our thoughts, and to subject them to the most rigid scrutiny, for the purpose of suppressing, upon its first appearance, what is base, impious, or unjust, and of giving every possible encouragement to the slightest emotions of piety and benevolence. So nice and delicate are the heart's springs of action, so susceptible is it of impressions from external objects, and so greatly is it in danger of being disordered by means of these, that we can never be sufficiently apprised of the manner in which it may be kept with safety.

II. THE WAY IN WHICH THIS DUTY MAY BE BEST DISCHARGED. 1. By summoning up to the view just apprehensions of God, of His greatness, and glory, and holiness, and justice, and authority, and mercy, and love, as exhibited in the plan of redemption, and endeavouring to have these apprehensions habitually impressed upon the mind. 2. We should beware, after having been engaged in any of the solemnities of religion, of exposing them suddenly to the renewed incursion of loose and worldly thoughts, by foolish talking or mixing with vain and giddy associates. 3. We must beware of evil company. And there are secret, as well as open, enemies of goodness. 4. We must carefully abstain from idleness, and rightly occupy every portion of our time.

III. RECOMMEND THE DUTY TO SERIOUS ATTENTION. You live in a world where ten thousand objects are ever ready to pollute the heart, and to seduce it from God. God requireth the heart of man—the whole heart, and nothing but the heart. A heart that is not kept with diligence is not reconciled to God; is not impressed with the love of Jesus; is not sanctified by the Spirit, and is not fit for heaven. (*James Somerville, D.D.*)

The duty and blessedness of keeping the heart:—I. OCCASIONS WHEN IT IS OF THE UTMOST MOMENT TO ATTEND TO THIS DUTY. 1. When you draw near to God in the solemn exercise of religious duty. You have then to do with a God who searches the heart. Be upon your guard against those vain excursions of the soul that eat out all the life and spirit of devotion. 2. When you are surrounded with an abundance of worldly enjoyments. There is something in prosperity that tends to intoxicate the mind. 3. When God's afflicting hand is upon you. "In the day of adversity

consider"; for consideration and a guard upon the heart are needful. 4. When under provocations from your fellow-creatures. These are very trying periods, and the spirit that is in us often lusteth to resentment and retaliation. Do not be too sensitive of injuries. 5. When your hands are full of worldly business. We walk in the midst of snares. It is no easy thing to keep our souls disengaged, and to live above, while we are in, the world. Love nothing with a very strong affection that is not immortal as thyself, and immutable as thy God. 6. When you are engaged in diversions and recreations. Very many are in excess given to pleasure, make it the main business of their existence. We ought not to give too much time to recreations, nor seek them for themselves. 7. When you find any tumultuous passions are excited within you. Think what inflammable matter you carry in your bosoms, and be watchful against the approach of whatever may kindle it into a flame. 8. Keep thy heart with all diligence in solitude and retirement. Solitude is not necessarily a blessing. Then only it is a blessing when it is employed piously, with holy feelings and a holy object in view. Whenever you are alone, be present with your God. II. ARGUMENTS URGING ATTENTION TO THIS DUTY. This duty is important, because—1. It is the heart that falls directly under the cognizance of God. Be a man's actions ever so regular, if his heart be not right with God, he will, when weighed in the balances, be found wanting. 2. Because of the influence which the state of the heart has upon the conduct. He who is concerned about making the tree good will surely make the fruit good also. 3. Because keeping the heart is essential to our peace. Is there nothing peaceful, pleasant, comforting, in being masters over our own spirits, able to suppress any rising passion, to restrain any rebellious lust that threatens the peace of God's kingdom within—of that inner house of man, himself? What a poor, contemptible, miserable creature is he who has no rule over his spirit, in respect of present things as well as future! III. DIRECTIONS FOR KEEPING THE HEART. 1. If you desire to keep your heart, endeavour by all means to know it. Endeavour to know human nature in general, its weakness and its corruption. Above all, endeavour to know your own heart, your particular weakness: knowing it, watch that point carefully. 2. If you desire to keep your heart, solemnly feel as in the Divine presence. Seriously consider that God searches the hearts, and that He is with you wherever you are, and whatever you do. 3. If you would keep your hearts, be often calling them to account. I hope that none of you live without self-examination. 4. See to it that your mind be well furnished. Lay in a stock of useful knowledge from the Word of God, from observations of providence, from converse with your fellow-creatures. 5. If you would keep your heart, be often looking up to Him who made it. To find our hearts taken off from dependence on ourselves, and fixed upon God, is a token for good in every part of our Christian course. (*T. Munns, M.A.*) *The custody of the heart:—*The "heart," in Scripture, implies the whole spiritual and aspiring part in man. Keeping the heart is controlling the whole spiritual condition of our nature. I. THE DEGREE OF RESPONSIBILITY IMPLIED IN THE COMMAND TO KEEP THE HEART. We are not mere machines, we are free, immortal, intelligent beings, fallen indeed from our first estate, crippled in body and soul, yet raised again in Christ. We are free to choose good or ill, and therefore responsible for the choice. To keep the heart is to guard it, to watch it, to subdue it. It is attempting, and by God's grace achieving, the work of self-conquest. The keeping must be habitual. Unless we have been previously vigilant, the tempter, when he comes, will be sure to conquer. One of the miseries of old transgressions is, that it mars the keeping of the heart. We are apt to fall back into a sin which we have committed before. Old sins tend to soften the soul—to emasculate its energies, to destroy those habits of carefulness which are so important in resisting temptation. It is the inward reciprocation with the outward temptation which forms the tempter's vantage-ground. Each sin diminishes by so much our chance of repentance, inasmuch as a fresh lesion and hurt has been inflicted on the soul. II. WE MUST CHIEFLY REGARD OUR WILL AND OUR AFFECTIONS, because these sway and control the rest of the inner man. By the will we mean that power of the soul which determines and chooses; by the affection, that attribute which loves and adheres. The one is the strength of the character, the other is its sweetness and beauty. And these are specially concerned in the service of God, for if man fulfils his end, God is the choice of his will and the object of his affection. God is the choice of man's will. The will of man must submit to God's will, for God's wisdom and goodness are necessities of his being. By the original constitution of man's nature, God was the object of his affection. Then

he should keep his affections for God "above all keeping." III. ALL THE OTHER POWERS OF THE SOUL MUST ALSO BE KEPT; for influences deteriorating or elevating are being hourly exercised upon them. The memory may be filled with vile images and unholy recollections, or it may be stored with pious thoughts and the sweet remembrance of past mercies. The imagination may be crowded with foul pictures, worldly fancies, and daring speculations, or it may be consecrated by visions of the beauty of God and the splendours of the New Jerusalem. The intellect may revel in the deceitful charms of scepticism and inquiry, or it may bow down in adoration before the tremendous supernatural truths of the Christian Church. The judgment may take its portion in this life and wed itself to earthly success, or it may choose the better part—sit at Jesus' feet and listen to His words. So the whole heart may be perverted or directed; and hence the urgent necessity of keeping it with diligence. (*Bp. A. P. Forbes.*)

The stronghold of the Christian sentinel:—I. THE CITADEL WHICH THE CHRISTIAN HAS TO GUARD. The heart of man is a wondrous mystery, a strange world in itself; its feelings, affections, desires, emotions, cravings, reasonings, wonderings—who shall tell them? The heart given the Christian soldier in charge is a heart that is renewed and yet unrenewed, that is holy and yet unholy, that is spirit and yet flesh. Such is the heart of every man that is born of the Spirit. The germ is there, but all that is good of that germ has yet to be unfolded and perfected. So long as the heart is kept a man is comparatively safe, for it is the key of the position. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING THIS CITADEL. Out of it are the issues of life in man's whole course and conduct, and out of it is the final result of a man's career and course of life. All the streams of life proceed from within. A man's life is regulated by his heart. If the heart be kept the man is kept, and it matters little what else a man keeps; for, after all, a man is what he is in principles, in desires, in emotions, and affections. Every Christian soldier must be aware that it is only by constant vigilance that he can maintain the citadel and prevent its being betrayed. There are two perils—betrayal within and surprise from without. There are many who, instead of keeping their heart, leave its keeping to Satan. And many fall because they allow their hearts to get out of their control. (*H. Stowell, M.A.*)

Watch the heart:—If you would keep the eye from injury, much more keep the heart, so susceptible as it is of complete disorganisation from the mere dust of an evil thought. If there is anything in the world which should be the object of unsleeping, anxious guardianship, it is the heart. Then keep it "above all keeping." It is evident, even to reason, that without this precaution of watchfulness over the heart every other counsel for resisting temptation must be of no avail. The heart is the key of the entire spiritual position. But the dangers of the heart are not merely external. There are many traitors in the camp. The exports and imports of the heart are exceedingly numerous. What a fertility of thought, sentiment, impression, feeling is there in the heart of a single man! There are a thousand doors of access to the heart. Passengers are busily passing in and thronging out at every door. Active steps must be taken to ensure against mischief-makers. Solitude is scarcely less dangerous in our spiritual welfare than company, because temptations of self and the devil meet us then. The remedy, in company or in solitude, is to guard, as far as in us lies, "the first springs of thought and will." By every spiritual man an attempt is made to bring the region of the heart—the motives, desires, affections—under the sceptre of Christ. It will be found that all the more grievous falls of the tempted soul come from this—that the keeping of the heart has been neglected, that the evil has not been nipped in the bud. There is no safety for us except in making our stand at the avenues of the will and rejecting at once every questionable impulse. This cannot be done without watchfulness and self-recollection. Endeavour to make your heart a little sanctuary, in which you may continually realise the presence of God, and from which unhallowed thoughts, and even vain thoughts, must carefully be excluded. We must watch, but we must also pray. Man must give his exertion, but he must never lean upon it. Prayer is, or ought to be, the expression of human dependence upon God—the throwing ourselves upon His protecting wisdom and power and love. When our Saviour counsels us to unite prayer with watching He counsels us to throw ourselves upon God, under a sense of our own weakness and total insufficiency. To God, then, let us commit the keeping of our souls in the most absolute self-distrust. (*Dean Goulburn.*)

God only judgeth of the heart:—I. AN ADMONITION. 1. The act: "Keep." Our hearts are untrusty, unruly, and obvious to be surprised; for such things we are wont to keep. II. THE OBJECT:

"The heart." By "heart" understand inward thoughts, motions, and affections of the soul and spirit, whereof the heart is the chamber. We should keep our hearts in a state of—1. Purity. 2. Loyalty. A loyal heart cherishes no darling sin; scruples at small sins; hates sin at all times. A loyal heart is the same as a "perfect" heart. III. THE MEANS OF KEEPING THE HEART "above all keeping." Nature hath placed the heart in the most fenced part of the body. 1. As those who keep a city have special care of the gates and posterns, so must we watch over the senses, the gates and windows of the soul, especially the eye and the ear. 2. Make exceeding much of all good motions put into our hearts by God's Spirit, and resist at its first rising every exorbitant thought which draws to sin. 3. Let him that would guard his heart take heed of familiar and friendly converse with lewd, profane, and ungracious company. This "keeping" must be done, because all spiritual life and living actions issue from the heart. This issuing of our works and actions from the heart is that which is called sincerity and truth, so much commended unto us in Scripture. That which is wanting in the measure of obedience and holiness is made up in the truth and sincerity thereof. (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*) *The issues of life out of the heart*:—First the fountain, then the streams; first the heart, and then the life-course. The issues of life are manifold; three of their main channels are mapped out here—the "lips," the "eyes," and the "feet." The corruption of the heart, the pollution of the spring-head, where all life's currents rise, is a very frequent topic in the Scriptures. The precept, "Keep thy heart with all diligence," sounds very like some of the sayings of Jesus. He said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries." Therefore keep with all diligence that prolific spring. Here, as in all other cases, prayer and pains must go together. "Keep it with all keeping" is the precise statement. Leave no means untried. Out of our own conduct will we be condemned if we do not effectually keep our own hearts. We keep other things with success as often as we set about it in earnest. In other keepings man is skilful and powerful too, but in keeping his own heart, unstable as water, he does not excel. Keep it from getting evil, as a garden is kept: keep it from doing evil, as the sea is kept at bay from reclaimed netherlands. 1. The first of the three streams marked on this map as issuing from an ill-kept heart is "a froward mouth." Words form the first and readiest egress for evil. The power of speech is one of the grand peculiarities which distinguish man. A vain, biting, untruthful, polluted, profane tongue cannot be in the family of God when the family are at home in their Father's presence. The evil must be put away; the tongue must be cleansed; and now is the day for such exercises. 2. The next outlet from the fountain is by the "eyes." Let the heart's aim be simple and righteous. No secret longings and side-glances after forbidden things, no crooked by-ends and hypocritical pretences. When the eye is single the whole body will be full of light. Straightforwardness is the fairest jewel of our commercial crown. 3. The last of these issues is by the "feet." Ponder, therefore, thy path. The best time to ponder any path is not at the end, not even at the middle, but at the beginning of it. The right place for weighing the worth of any course is on this side of its beginning. Those who ponder after they have entered it are not in a position either to obtain the truth or to profit by it. The injunction applies to every step in life, small or great. The value of weighing anything depends all on the justness of the balance and the weights. By the Word of God paths and actions will be weighed in the judgment. By the Word of God, therefore, let paths and actions, great and small, be pondered now. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The fountain of life (to children)*:—In each one of you there is a small organ or member which is sometimes called the seat or throne of life. Its work is to beat out the blood to every part of the body, and so to keep the red stream of life always moving. The text speaks about another heart and another life which we all have. There is a something within a child with which he thinks and loves, hates and wishes, and that something the Bible calls our heart. It means your very self. Out of this heart are the "issues," the flowings or streams, of life. A man's real life flows from his love. Thoughts and wishes, likes and dislikes, love and hate—these are the great workers that build up and pull down and do all that is done in the world. Every human life, good or bad, flows like a stream from good or bad thoughts, good or bad wishes. When a man loves goodness, longs for it, thinks about it, a life full of noble, kindly deeds flows like a pure stream out of his heart. But if a man likes what is wrong, thinks wicked thoughts, a stream of bad deeds will flow out of his heart. God guards carefully the heart He has put into your body. He has put the

strongest bones all round it, so that, though other parts may be easily hurt, the heart is safe. The text says we should guard the heart of our real lives—our mind—in the same way “with all diligence,” because, if the heart goes wrong, the whole life goes wrong with it. How can we guard the heart? By keeping bad thoughts, bad wishes, out of it. (*J. M. Gibbon.*) *The heart more than the head*:—Most men practically underrate the influence of the heart, compared with that of the head, on success and happiness. Reason, the intellect, the head and not the heart, is usually regarded as man's dignity. But it is his reason as manifested in his active and moral powers. Knowledge is not power—personal power—but only one of its instruments. The power is not in the knowledge, but in the moral qualities or passions which accompany it, which lie behind it, constituting what is called “force of character.” The essence of greatness, always and everywhere, is a great spirit. If we aspire not only to be great, but to be truly happy, the heart is not only the principal thing, it is almost everything. What is happiness but the sum total of the gratifications of a man's affections and desires? The heart has more to do than the head in determining the distinctions of character. A man's real character depends, not on his outward actions, but on the principles from which he acts—those principles which are real springs of action. All the distinctions of character resolve themselves at last into distinctions of disposition and temper, and not of intellect or understanding. In everything pertaining to human greatness and human happiness, to moral and Christian character, to final salvation, the heart is more than the head. The heart is the principal thing. Out of that, and that alone, are the issues of life. (*James Walker.*) *Dependence on our inward frame*:—I. THE ISSUES OF LIFE, IN A RELIGIOUS RESPECT, DEPEND UPON THE HEART. All things relating to religious conduct are reducible either to some matter of belief or practice. How far are belief and practice subject to be influenced by the heart? 1. To begin with belief. How much that depends upon the temper and disposition of the heart is easily seen from Scripture, history, and daily experience. 2. Our practice. How far is the practice apt to be governed by the inclination of the heart without the concurrence of the judgment, or even in opposition to it? Men are generally more swayed by their affections and passions than by their principles, and principles are of very little force or efficacy except when they fall in with inclination or grow up into it. Knowledge is one thing and grace another. Orthodoxy is not probity. A sound head may often be consistent with a corrupt heart. It is not what we believe, but what we affect and incline to, that determines us. But our irregular actions seem rather ultimately resolvable into the false judgments which we make than into affection or inclination; the head is first tainted, then the heart. The error, however, both of judgment and practice is really due to the corruption of the heart. When some sensible good is presented to the eye or to the mind the man judges it to be agreeable or pleasant to the sense, and so far judges right. Yet this alone would not determine his choice, because other considerations, more weighty, might keep him from it. But he dwells upon the thought till his heart is inflamed: then he chooses, and not till then. The drift and bent of his soul leaning too much toward it, he cuts off all farther consideration, and is precipitately determined by it. It is the desire, the impatience, the passion of his heart that hurries him into it. Men act against principle, driven on by a prevailing passion. (1) Either we think not at all for the time of the general principles which we hold, but suffer them to lie dormant and useless in us; or (2) if we think of them, we neglect to apply them to our own particular case, imagining ourselves to be unconcerned in them; or (3) if we do apply them, and consequently are self-condemned and sensible of it, yet we hope to repent and to be saved notwithstanding. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED OR CONTAINED IN THE PRECEPT OF THE TEXT. It must consist of two parts or offices—1. To preserve our good dispositions. 2. To correct our bad ones. These will each of them imply two other things—a frequent examination of our own hearts, and a constant endeavour to wean our affections from this world and to fix them on another. (*D. Waterland, D.D.*) *The importance of keeping the heart*:—A most important reason is here assigned for “keeping the heart with all diligence,” because “out of it are the issues of life.” 1. THE HEART IN THE BODY OF MAN IS THE CENTRE OF LIFE. As the heart is, so is our general conduct. But if the fountain is poisoned, the streams will carry death and desolation in their course. If the principle of the action be defective or vitiated, the action cannot be otherwise. “Keep thy heart with all diligence,” because the state of it determines our real character; and because upon the state of it

essentially depends the comfort or wretchedness of our lives. When temptations suited to the latest propensity to sin are presented—when strong inducements are offered to passion not under due control—the practice will follow the corrupt desire of the heart. Thus the evil heart will show itself, and, by its acting, prove the melancholy truth that when the heart itself is not kept, no mere professions, no outward restrictions, will be sufficient to keep us from falling. But, further, a right state of heart is essential to our own comfort and welfare. A man's happiness consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses. These are things without a man, which cannot adapt themselves to his wants within. What can outward means avail in lessening the terrors of guilt in an awakened conscience, or in calming the fears of an approaching judgment? To the natural principles of evil in the heart, moreover, Satan is ever adapting his temptations and wiles. And where lies his chief hope of success? Is it not in our remissness? Whilst we sleep he is awake. II. We proceed to offer some suggestions as to the manner in which this important duty may be most effectually discharged. 1. The right keeping of the heart especially includes the government of our thoughts, our passions, and our temper. If, either wilfully or through neglect and inattention, we suffer our hearts to lie open to thoughts of foolishness and sin, and permit them to lodge within us, then the guilt of these thoughts becomes our own. But the due control of the passions is equally essential, if we would keep our hearts aright. As originally implanted in our nature, and kept in subserviency to reason, these were designed to be instruments of good—the elements of what was great and virtuous in human conduct. But sin has disordered them all. In the Christian, the passions are subjugated to Christ. This is an essential feature in his character. 2. But to keep the heart is also to regulate the temper. Whatever difference there may be in natural dispositions, settled depravity of temper, without any effort to correct it, can arise only from the deep and unaltered corruption of our hearts. To oppose and to destroy this natural and sinful bias is one of the great aims of the religion of the Bible; and where this has been in no measure secured it is a mournful proof that the heart has never been brought or kept under the influence of religion at all. If these things be implied as essential to the keeping of the heart, how valuable and important are those means which, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, will most successfully realise this great object! Amongst these means, watchfulness and prayer. (C. Buck, M.A.) *Guarding the heart*:—More exactly the meaning is this: "Keep thine heart beyond everything else you keep; guard thine heart above all else, for out of it are the issues of life." Not your health, not your reputation, not your business credit, not your property—beyond all these things give time and thought to the culture of your heart. If you must take time from one thing or another, rather starve your business than let your heart run to waste. Your heart—what has your heart got to do with your actual life? John Stuart Mill's father thought it counted for nothing, or, rather, it was a bad debt, it was a loss, it was a detriment to have a heart, to have feelings, to have emotions. Power, intellect, and strength of will, these were the elements to make a man, and the less heart he carried about with him—well, the less dead weight and the less risk of his being led wrong. And the Bible comes in and says to the business man, "Beyond your books and your accounts and your shops and your speculations and your clients, watch over your heart, think about it, take care of it, toil to keep it in health and in beauty." The Bible comes and says the same thing to the servant girl trying to do her duty faithfully, to the working man wishing to improve his position in the world, to the learned man bent on discovering new truth. Yes, your toil, your ambition, your researches, your discoveries, commerce, industry, learning, are all of them good, but the most precious thing is the human heart. Whatever else suffers, see that your heart does not suffer. This proverb runs right in the teeth of the whole mass of our daily life; runs against the whole current and tendency of our education, and our habits, and our notions. The proverb gives its reason—a reason that will stand and hold its own in the court of common sense, as well as at the last judgment. "Beyond everything else, take care of your heart, for out of your heart are the issues of your life." Not out of your body, not out of your intellect, not out of your business, not out of your property, not out of your wisdom, not out of your fame—out of your heart are the essential elements and sustenance of your life, its last results for joy or for sorrow. "Out of the heart are the issues of life." The phrase makes a picture. You are travelling in the desert with a caravan over the hot sand. The sky above you with a sultry sun in it, the hot ground beneath your feet, your eye wearied, tired, inflamed

by the glare above, the glare below; you long to set eyes on the green leaf. In the distance you get sight of something in the air. You draw nearer to it, it grows and forms itself, framed there in the wilderness like a picture—a clump of palm-trees; beneath, green grass; in the branches, birds singing; lazy cattle reclining on the herbage, sheep bleating. You penetrate into it, you discover the tents and homes of men; women and children playing around, life, beauty. Whence, whence all that? Right there in the centre of it you come on a deep, brimming pool of water, fed by a perpetual fountain, like an eye looking up to the sky—ah, more than an eye, the very fountain of all that greenness and beauty; blossom, herbage, sheep, cow, bird, man, woman, child, all of them the outcome of that springing fountain of water. "Out of it are the issues of life." Poison it, and all that dies. Turn it brackish, and all withers and diminishes and decays. Quench it, stop it, and the desert flows over the green oasis. Like that fountain of living water is your heart within you. Your heart it is that makes your life to flow, fair, radiant, or poor, poverty-stricken, cold, dead. What is your heart like? What is a man's heart? Well, it is not easy to describe that, and yet we all know well enough what we mean by it. We cannot just put our finger on where it is, or say precisely what it is; but oh, how well you know when your heart bounds with joy, or when it grips together with sharp pain, sorrow, disappointment! Oh, you know it is just the inner core of cravings and hopes and eager wishes and conscious personal thoughts and plans and purposes and attributes that makes you your own very self, that gives you your disposition, that makes up your temperament, that settles your character, that fashions your conduct. Oh, what a blunder a man makes when he thinks that his life will be planned and made by his intellect! There never yet was a man who thought that by his mind he could steer his own course through the world that did not find his heart steal a march upon him. A man's heart—that is what makes him, that is what determines a man's choice at all the great critical points in life. A man's heart it is that settles what his home is to be, that chooses the partner that is to be his, for better, for worse, for him, for her. It is a man's heart that chooses fleshly, that chooses spiritually; that chooses unselfishly, that chooses selfishly; that chooses for the outward appearance, or chooses for heart-worth. "Oh," you say, "there is not much heart in a great many of these things." I beg your pardon, there is: plenty of heart, but it is base, worldly, greedy, grasping heart; or silly, selfish, vain, flattered heart. When a man's life shows little or nothing of the echoes of lofty, generous, chivalrous thought and purpose and endeavour, we constantly use a false expression, saying, "He has got no heart." How is it that a score of men that are your daily associates or friends, all of them educated pretty much on the same level, similar to one another in manner, of the same deportment, and even the same politics—how is it that they are all so unlike you? Is it that the one man's talk is tiresome and wearisome? How is it that you feel as if he were made of wood? How is it that the other man has that glow and sparkle that sends a thrill through you, that stimulates you, that makes you think, that so brings out responses that you admire your own cleverness? What makes the difference? Why, it is not the amount of grammar the one learned more than the other, or that the one has read more books. No, not that. It is the inner core and kernel of the one man compared with what is inside the other. Heart, rich heart! for out of the heart in very deed and truth are the ripe, supreme issues of life—life social, life personal, life earthly, and life eternal. Now, if that be true, that a man's life really depends, beyond everything else, on his inner man, on his heart, on his disposition, on his temperament, on his character formed within him, how is it that we do not take a deal more trouble to take care of our hearts? Ah, there are a lot of books that talk about success that are full of the devil's lies. A man is a great success because he died a millionaire! Oh, a man may make himself a millionaire and miss making himself a man in the image of God, in the likeness of Christ. Success in life is measured by the heart you die with. Why, then, do not we take more pains about our hearts? How many of us do it? For every one of you knows that is just the thing we neglect. Even our bodily hearts, I suppose, physicians would tell us, we do not take half care enough of. Rather than lose five minutes and miss a train we run, and risk sudden death, or actually damage the working of the central fountain of life in our bodies. And how we ever toil and tax the whole inner core of that body of ours for things not worth it. For, if a man loses his health, what is money to him? Yes, we imagine that our hearts take care of themselves. No man imagines that his accounts will collect themselves. No man imagines that his house will repair itself. Why, you

must give as much care to the ties of love and children, if you are to keep these beautiful and fair, as you do to make your garden free from weeds, and your house water-tight and weather-tight, and your business a solvent concern. And besides, there is another mistake that people make. They say to themselves, "I am not the one that makes my heart. It is the life that I have to live that should make my heart; it is my circumstances, my fortunes. I am a very miserable man indeed, always careworn and anxious, never able to feel bright and cheerful. When I hear my neighbour whistling in the evening in his garden I envy him; but then he has not the worries that I have." Very likely he has got much worse ones, but he has got the sense to leave them down in the office. That is how he kept his health. It was not easy. The cares and anxieties followed him into the train, got out at the station, stole up the garden; and the man had the wisdom and the strength to slam the door and not let them in. That is how he kept his heart and brain and health up, and his inmost heart of all. How is a man to make the most of his heart? How to keep it pure in this foul world? How to lift it above the grime, and the dust, and the tear and wear? How to make it large and noble, the biggest and most beautiful according to God's plan? By not leaving it in this world, but by taking it out of this world? Ah, no; not out of this world, but in this world to bring it into another world; not by keeping it to yourself and making it in the measure of your own self, but by taking that heart of yours and letting Christ into it—the real, simple human Jesus. Oh, beyond all thy keeping, keep thy heart! and that thou shalt do best by giving it away to Christ. (*Prof. Elmslie.*)

What is imported in keeping the heart, and the best means of doing it:—I. EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THIS PRECEPT. We need not, it should seem, be told that we are each of us endowed with a power of reflecting upon our own desires and affections, and with a certain invariable standard within us, by which we are enabled to judge whether these inward principles are right or wrong. Nor should we need to be told that our affections and passions are in a great measure under the influence of conscience, and of the superior calm principles, and instincts, by which it was intended they should be controlled. He is the man of worth, he only is truly so, who can hazard an appeal to the Searcher of Hearts, that he does not indulge any vicious affection within him, but makes it his constant business to purify the heart. I have only to add farther, that the great duty recommended in my text must be understood to signify that we should watch over and resist the first workings of passion, the conceptions of lust. II. THE MOST EFFECTUAL HELPS FOR OUR DOING THIS WITH SUCCESS.

1. And here, in the first place, we are to turn our thoughts to our Creator. Frequent and serious contemplation of His perfections, and of the relation in which we stand to Him, is undoubtedly the most effectual of all means, in forming the heart to goodness. 2. The second thing I would recommend is a virtuous industry. We are formed for action; and when the powers are not employed in something worthy, they are likely enough to find employment of another sort. 3. It is of very great importance that men choose such to be their intimate familiar acquaintances as have a right temper and a just taste in life; that their daily conversation may be such as will not only not endanger innocence and virtue, but contribute to the guarding and strengthening of them. There is a mighty power in conversation, in the behaviour of our familiar acquaintances, to affect the mind, and to render us like them in temper. 4. Conversing much with the heart, observing the tendencies of the affections with care, and endeavouring to preserve always a just sense of things upon the mind, will be found of the greatest use. Taking the tendency of our desires and inclinations to task with severity, and examining the pretences under which the various gratifications of them are recommended. By such a careful attention to ourselves we shall find out the deceitfulness of sin, and those snares which prejudice conceals from the unthinking; we shall be able to resist temptations with firmness and resolution; for in truth, the success of them, where they do prevail, is in a great measure owing to carelessness and inattention. (*Jas. Duchal, D.D.*) *Keeping the heart* (a sermon to children):—All wise people like to go deeply into a thing, to go to the root of it. What is your root? Where is it? Your "heart." A little boy had a very nice watch; but it would not go right. It had a very pretty case, and face; but it sometimes went too fast, and sometimes too slow. He asked his mother what he should do about it. She told him to take it to the watchmaker's. He did so; and he said, "Master John, it has its hands all right, but it will not go right. Therefore leave it with me, and come again in a few days, and I will tell you what is the matter with it." John went again to him in a few days, and the watchmaker said to him, "I opened

your watch, and I found there was the right number of wheels, and pins, and screws; but I found a little part called 'the spring' which was wrong; and because the main-spring was wrong, it sometimes went too fast, and sometimes too slow." Now, I think, you are all like watches. Something within you goes tick, tick, and you have hands and inside works. But how do you go? Sometimes too fast, and sometimes too slow. Does not the tongue sometimes go too fast or too slow? Are not the feet sometimes too fast or too slow? Are not the hands sometimes going wrong? How is this? Let us examine—though I am not the watchmaker—God is the watchmaker: the main-spring is the heart. Everything in you depends upon your "heart." God always looks most at the "heart." What do you think God will look at in the day of judgment? Your "heart." That is what He will want to know about. Now as it is so important to "keep the heart" right, I want to try to help you to do so, by giving you a little advice thereupon. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." One thing is to "keep" it as we "keep" a garden—neat. Now, then, if you would "keep" your garden, you must often look into it. And I will tell you what you will find there—every day there will grow lumps of weeds; however well you may have weeded it yesterday, you will find more weeds to-day. Pull them out! Then another thing—you must water it. This wants doing very often. Do you know what I mean? If not, look at the fourth of John, to what Jesus Christ said about water, and what it is. Bring the Holy Spirit into your heart. Pray that God will pour good thoughts—His grace—into your heart: that is water. If you want to "keep your heart," do not let there be any empty corners therein. God likes all boys and girls to be employed—sometimes at their lessons, sometimes at play; sometimes helping somebody, thinking, reading, or playing, to be always employed. I must tell you, if you do not always employ yourselves—if you are idle, and thinking about nothing, the devil is sure to come into your hearts. Another piece of advice I give you is this, be very particular whom you make your intimate friends. You must "keep your heart" from catching those evil desires that naughty boys and girls will suggest. One thing more. Have you not sometimes, when anybody has given you anything uncommonly valuable, taken it to your father, and said, "It is too precious for me to keep, I am afraid of losing it, do take care of it for me"? It is very wise for boys and girls to do this with their treasures. Oh, that you would do this with your heart! You cannot "keep" it yourself; therefore often take it to God: ask Him to keep your heart. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Things the heart is like*:—1. The heart is a lamp, which the High and Holy One has entrusted to our care. Keep it well trimmed. 2. The heart is a ship. Look to the hull and the rudder, the masts, the sails, and the rigging. Have an eye to the crew, and take care what merchandise you have aboard; mind that you have plenty of ballast, and do not carry too much sail. 3. The heart is a temple. Keep it pure and undefiled. 4. The heart is a besieged city, and liable to attacks on all sides. While you defend one part, keep a good look-out on the other. (*Old Humphrey.*)

Vers. 24-27. Put away from thee a froward mouth.—*Laws of life*:—A law for the tongue, a law for the eye, a law for the mind, a law for the life. I. A DEMAND FOR PURE LANGUAGE. Speech is one of the grand peculiarities that distinguish man. It is the organ by which one man can influence the ages. Yet it has become the vehicle of error, the channel of pollution, the utterance of blasphemy, &c. A pure heart is essential to pure speech. II. A DEMAND FOR A STRAIGHTFORWARD PURPOSE. Have no side-glances, no by-ends; but have a grand purpose on which the eye of the soul shall be always fixed. Straightforwardness stands opposed to all sly cunning, all vacillation, all ambiguity; all double meanings and aims. III. A DEMAND FOR HABITUAL THOUGHTFULNESS. Man was made not only to think, but to be thoughtful. He should walk the path of life—1. Thoughtfully, not by impulse. 2. Thoughtfully, not by prejudice. 3. Thoughtfully, not by custom. IV. A DEMAND FOR UNSWERVING RECTITUDE. Duty is a straight path. The way of sin is serpentine in its shape as well as in its spirit. Virtue is a straight line running right up to God. Any turn, therefore, would be wrong and risky. Take care: there are by-paths tempting in every direction. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.—*Eyes right*:—These words occur in a passage wherein the wise man exhorts us to take care of all parts of our nature, which he indicates by members of the body. Every part of our nature needs to be carefully watched, lest in any

way it should become the cause of sin. Any one member or faculty is readily able to defile all the rest, and therefore every part must be guarded with care. Having eyes, use them; using them, take care to use them honestly. Some persons are always as if they were asleep. Others are somewhat awake mentally, but are not looking right on; they are star-gazing; they lead but a purposeless life. A man ought to have a way; it should be a straight way; and in that straight way he should persevere. The best way for a man is the way which God has made for him. When you are on the King's highway, you may go ahead without fear.

I. LET CHRIST BE YOUR WAY. If He be, you will begin first to seek to have Christ. Then you will want to know Christ. Then you will go on to obey Christ. Then you will seek to be like Christ.

II. SET YOUR EYES ON CHRIST AS YOUR WAY. Think of Him, consider Him, study Him.

1. That you may know the way of life, let your eyes be fixed on Him.
2. That you may follow Him well, follow Him wholly. Gather up all your faculties to go after the Lord.
3. Look alone to Jesus, and do this to keep your spirits up. Some live in retrospection; others in unhealthy introspection; and yet others carry much too far a sort of circumspection. If you begin to look two ways at a time, you will miss the Lord Jesus.

Under the Jewish law no man who had a squint was allowed to be a priest.

III. LET YOUR EYES DISTINCTLY AND DIRECTLY LOOK TO CHRIST ALONE.

1. Look not to any human guide.
2. Look to Christ for yourself.
3. Look not to any secondary aims.
4. Forget all things when seeing Christ.
5. Take care that you continue gazing upon Christ until you have faith in Him. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Simplicity :—What is in these terms specially indicated is simplicity of principle and aim; singleness of motive; an upright, unswerving regard to duty. The path of duty is one. It is narrow and straight. On it the eye should constantly and steadily be set—looking “right on,” not to any seducing objects that present themselves on the one hand or on the other. Many things may allure—may hold out tempting seductions from the onward path. Many other paths may appear more smooth, more easy, and in all respects for the time more desirable; but the one and only question must ever be, What is duty? (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

Looking to our way of life :—God's people have their minds made up as to all those things which concern their everlasting interests. But to know our way is of little use unless we keep that way in view. There are many spiritual travellers who know the way to Zion, but have not their faces thitherward. The text is an important motto for every man who is setting out for heaven. To understand the use and value of this precept, consider it—

I. AS IT APPLIES TO THE FAITH OF THE CHILD OF GOD. By the “faith” is meant the great doctrines on which their hopes are grounded. Often, in our experience, we are tempted to entertain unworthy thoughts of the gracious Saviour; to mix up our own works with the plan of His redemption, to place the confidence in frames and feelings, in notions and professions, which should be placed in Him alone. Against such temptations the text provides a remedy. Keep Jesus constantly in view.

II. AS IT APPLIES TO THE DUTIES OF THE CHILD OF GOD. The text is a preservative against unlawful pleasures and indulgences. It is an exhortation to a close and constant obedience to the revealed will of God, and to the duty of Christian integrity—to an honest, upright, guileless conduct in all our dealings with mankind. Seek, then, strength from God, that you may continue steadfast in the holy course of life, as advised in this text. (A. Roberts, M.A.)

Ver. 26. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.—Pondering the path :—Mystery surrounds me. I find myself a resident of the illimitable realm of the unknown. The commonest objects touching me on every side start unanswerable questions. But amidst these enveloping mysteries, like a rock in the central ocean, emerges this certainty—“I am.” That means, I know I am. I am dowered with self-consciousness. There is a chasm wide and awful between myself and everything which is not myself; the “me” is other than the “not-me”; I am a separate, solitary soul. Amid all the mystery surrounding me, there emerges this other certainty—“I ought.” That means, I have the power of referring what I am to the judgment of the moral sense. There is, and must be, an irreversible distinction between what I ought and what I ought not. There is both a standard and an ability of discrimination. There is a law of right and wrong of which the moral sense takes cognisance. Amid the mystery there arises another certainty—“I can.” That means, I dwell in the sphere of moral freedom; the helm of my being is in the hand of an unenslaved volition; I possess a self-determining and sovereign will. I am not a thrall, a thing; I

am a power. There emerges this other certainty—"I will." That means, I exercise my power in this direction or in that. I will to do the thing I ought not, or the thing I ought. Man is a moral being, capable of choice, and actually choosing. You should ponder the path of your feet—I. BECAUSE YOUR FEET ARE PRESSING TOWARD AN END BY WHICH YOUR WHOLE PREVIOUS PATH IN LIFE IS TO FIND FINAL TEST. Thomas Carlyle says, "It is the conclusion that crowns the work; much more the irreversible conclusion wherein all is concluded; thus is there no life so mean but a death will make it memorable." As you are going now what will that final test of the end declare? II. BECAUSE THIS MOMENT YOU ARE CHOOSING YOUR PATH. You should ask yourself whether it be the right one. III. BECAUSE THE LONGER YOU WALK IN THE WRONG PATH THE HARDER IT WILL BE TO GET OUT OF IT INTO THE RIGHT. The awful law of habit; the binding power of bad companionships, &c. (*Homiletic Magazine.*) *Spiritual anatomy: the feet*.—I. THEIR NATURAL COURSE. 1. Found in the way of evil. 2. Which has diverse paths. 3. These paths fatal in their termination. II. TRANSITION OF THE FEET TO THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. 1. Consideration. 2. Arrestment. 3. Abandonment of evil way. 4. Prayer. 5. Decision. III. THE FEET CONSECRATED TO DIVINE SERVICE. 1. They stand on a rock. 2. Enjoy liberty. 3. Established by the Lord. 4. Guided in the way to life eternal. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Life a path*.—1. Unique, difficult, momentous. 2. This path, this journey, will be travelled but once—there is never a retracing of our steps. 3. A false guide, a false step, may prove eternally fatal. 4. The path is intricate, and nothing short of the utmost care, and constant watchfulness, and thorough discipline of heart and life can carry one safely through it. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *Feet and eyes joined*.—The wise man joins the feet unto the eyes, intimating that our actions should be weighed, as well as our thoughts, words, and looks. I. WE MUST BEFOREHAND ORDER ALL WELL THAT WE GO ABOUT. 1. Lest we show our folly to all men by our indiscreet actions. 2. Lest we run ourselves into danger. 3. Because our actions are dangerous as well as our thoughts, looks, and words; and these were all to be ordered. Bring all your actions to the touchstone before you do them. Weigh them in a just balance. II. THE MEANEST MEMBERS OF THE BODY MUST BE WELL-ORDERED. The foot is lowest, yet must not be left at liberty to go where it will. 1. Because the meanest members are of necessary use. 2. Because they, being disordered, bring much hurt. III. ENDEAVOUR TO ACT SURELY IN WHAT YOU DO. Show your wisdom by your sure and just acting according to God's Word, and it will stand. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Self-examination explained and recommended*.—It is our wisdom to look into our own hearts, to inquire seriously and impartially into the state of religion in our minds; that we may form a true judgment of our real character in the sight of God, and may be better able to regulate our future conduct. I. EXPLAIN THE PRECEPT OF THE TEXT: "Ponder the path of thy feet." This includes—1. A serious inquiry into our past conduct, i.e., of the general tenor of our conduct; whether it has been agreeable to our character as men and as Christians, agreeable to the dictates of right reason, and the precepts of the gospel. 2. A diligent examination of the motives of our conduct, and the principal ends we have pursued in life; whether they are those which religion points out, or those which are recommended by the example of the world around us. Let us particularly attend to the state of our mind. Our chief motive is to be the "glory of God." This motive is of all others the most extensive, and where it has its due place in the mind, will prove the most effectual means of regulating the conduct. 3. Considering attentively what our ruling passion is, and what influence it has had in determining our conduct. Every man has something peculiar in the make or constitution of his mind, which inclines him more strongly to some pursuits than to others, and which consequently lays him more open to temptation from that quarter than from any other. 4. A diligent inquiry into the present temper and state of our minds; the settled purpose and resolution of the mind, the prevailing bent of the will and affections. In what light does sin appear to us? What are our sentiments of the law of God? How do we stand affected towards the great objects of faith? 5. The examination recommended in the text must be accompanied with a sincere resolution and a correspondent endeavour by Divine assistance to reform the errors of our past life, and to make continual advances in virtue and goodness. II. THE ADVANTAGES THAT WILL ATTEND THE PRACTICE OF IT. Steadiness and uniformity of conduct is the result of habitual consideration and reflection. 1. This will be a probable means of securing us from all fatal errors and miscarriages, or of restoring us to the path of duty, if we have

wandered from it. 2. The habit of reflection will confirm and strengthen the mind, and enable us to make continual advances in holiness. III. SOME DIRECTIONS THAT MAY ASSIST US IN THE PERFORMANCE OF WHAT HAS BEEN RECOMMENDED. 1. Set yourself as in the presence of God. 2. Implore the Divine direction and assistance. 3. Be upon your guard against the deceitfulness of your own hearts, while you are conversing with them. 4. Fear not to know the worst of your case. 5. Pursue the inquiry till you have brought it to some conclusion, and faithfully observe and comply with the admonitions which conscience may give you. 6. Frequently renew the exercise of self-examination according to the directions laid down. Improvement—1. See the great end we should propose to ourselves by this self-inquiry. 2. The great importance of self-examination to the Christian life. (R. Clark.) *Salutary counsel*:—I. PONDER THAT PORTION OF OUR PATH WHICH WE HAVE ALREADY TRODDEN. 1. Has it been the way of evil? 2. Have we visited Calvary? 3. Has it been a path of usefulness? II. PONDER THE PORTION OF THE PATH WHICH WE ARE NOW TREADING. 1. Is it lawful ground? 2. Are we following the footprints of Jesus? These are found, and found only, in heavenly paths. 3. Is there a light shining upon the road? "The way of the wicked is as darkness," because it is their own evil, dismal, unhappy, and dangerous way; but the path of the justified is that of increasing holiness and joy. III. PONDER THAT PORTION OF OUR PATH WHICH WE HAVE YET TO TREAD. 1. It is beset with snares and dangers. 2. It passes through the valley and shadow of death. There is now no other way to immortality. 3. It leads either to heaven or to hell. (*The Congregational Pulpit*.) *Christian casuistry*:—I. WE OUGHT TO PONDER OUR STEPS IN REGARD TO THE PRINCIPLE FROM WHICH THEY PROCEED. An action good in itself may become criminal if it proceed from a bad principle. The little attention we pay to this maxim is one principal cause of the false judgments we make of ourselves. Would you always take right steps? Never take one without first examining the motive which engages you to take it. II. WE OUGHT TO PONDER OUR STEPS IN REGARD TO THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH ACCOMPANY THEM. An action, good or innocent in itself, may become criminal in certain circumstances. This maxim is a clue to many cases of conscience in which we choose to blind ourselves. We obstinately consider our actions in a certain abstracted light, and do not attend to circumstances which change the nature of the action. III. WE OUGHT TO EXAMINE THE MANNERS THAT ACCOMPANY OUR WAYS. Actions, good in themselves, become criminal when they are not performed with proper dispositions. II. AN ACTION, GOOD IN ITSELF, MAY BECOME CRIMINAL BY BEING EXTENDED BEYOND ITS PROPER LIMITS. "Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself overwise." 1. In regard to the mysteries of religion. 2. In regard to charity. 3. In regard to closet devotion; in regard to distrusting yourselves and fearing the judgments of God. V. AN ACTION, GOOD WHEN IT IS PERFORMED BY A MAN ARRIVED AT A CERTAIN DEGREE OF HOLINESS, BECOMES CRIMINAL WHEN IT IS DONE BY HIM WHO HATH ONLY AN INFERIOR DEGREE. If we wish our ways to be established, let us weigh them with the different judgments which we ourselves form concerning them. Set the judgment which we shall one day form of them against that which we now form. In order to obey the precept of the wise man, we should collect our thoughts every morning, and never begin a day without a cool examination of the whole business of it. (*James Saurin*.)

Ver. 27. *Turn not to the right hand nor to the left.*—*Religious and moral conduct*:—Whatever the belief of men be, they generally pride themselves on the possession of some good moral qualities. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes into which men run in their moral behaviour. One of the first and most common of those extremes is that of placing all virtue either in justice on the one hand or in generosity on the other. Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. The perfection of our social character consists in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course which admits of our being just without being rigid, and allows us to be generous without being unjust. We must next guard against either too great severity or too great facility of manners. He who leans to the side of severity is harsh in his censures and narrow in his opinions. The opposite extreme is more dangerous—that of too great facility and accommodation to the ways of others. Such a man views every character with an indulgent eye. Nothing, in moral conduct, is more difficult than to avoid turning here, either

to the right hand or to the left; to preserve a just medium. True religion enjoins us to pursue the difficult but honourable aim of uniting good-nature with fixed religious principle, affable manners with untainted virtue. Further, we run to one extreme, when we condemn altogether the opinions of mankind; to another, when we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter betrays servility of spirit. He who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind suppresses one incentive to honourable deeds, and removes one of the strongest checks on vice. He who is actuated solely by the love of human praise encroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited, and religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular tastes. Then there is the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about worldly interests on the one hand and of negligence on the other. We need also to be warned against the extreme of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of being devoted to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action and retreat. Temper business with serious meditation, and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry. Let us study to attain a regular, uniform, consistent character, where nothing that is excessive or disproportioned shall come forward to view. Turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, we shall, as far as our frailty permits, approach to the perfection of the human character. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*)

CHAPTER V.

VERS. 1-14. My son, attend unto my wisdom.—Caution against sexual sins:— The scope of the passage is a warning against seventh-commandment sins, which youth is so prone to, the temptations to which are so violent, the examples of which are so many, and which, where admitted, are so destructive to all the seeds of virtue in the soul. We are warned—I. THAT WE DO NOT LISTEN TO THE CHARMS OF THIS SIN. 1. How fatal the consequences will be! The terrors of conscience. The torments of hell. 2. How false the charms are! The design is to keep them from choosing the path of life, to prevent them from being religious. In order thereunto, to keep them from pondering the path of life. II. THAT WE DO NOT APPROACH THE BORDERS OF SIN. The caution is very pressing. 1. We ought to have a very great dread and detestation of the sin. 2. We ought industriously to avoid everything that may be an occasion of this sin, or a step towards it. Those that would keep out of harm must keep out of harm's way. 3. We ought to be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy, and not be over-confident of the strength of our own resolutions. 4. Whatever has become a snare to us and an occasion of sin, we must part with at any cost (*Matt. v. 28-30*). III. THE ARGUMENTS ENFORCING THE CAUTION. The mischiefs that attend this sin. 1. It blasts the reputation. 2. It wastes the time. 3. It ruins the estate. 4. It is destructive to the health. 5. It will fill the mind with terror, if ever conscience be awakened. Solomon here brings in the convinced sinner reproaching himself and aggravating his own folly. He will then most bitterly lament it. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 2. That thou mayest regard discretion.—The wise man's intention in giving advice:— Some knit these words to what follows, and understand them thus: "I wish thee to hearken to wise counsels, that thy heart may not admit thoughts of the beauty of strumpets, nor thy lips talk of such wanton objects as they talk of, but that thy thoughts and words may be sober and honest." Others knit them to the words before, as if he had said, "Observe my wise precepts, that thou mayest well ruminatate of them, and be so full of good thoughts in thy heart, that thou mayest be able to produce them copiously in thy words for the good of others, as I do for thine. But especially that thou mayest know what to think and speak of strumpets' fair words and alluring carriage." I. A READINESS TO ATTEND WILL BRING A STORE OF KNOWLEDGE. II. LET US GET READY EARS AND HEARTS TO GET KNOWLEDGE. III. GOOD THINGS HEARD MUST BE SERIOUSLY THOUGHT ON, THEN AND AFTER. IV. WE MUST LABOUR TO KNOW SO AS NOT ONLY TO UNDERSTAND, BUT ALSO TO UTTER WHAT WE KNOW IN FIT WORDS. That we may profit others. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Vers. 3-5. For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb.—*A strange woman* :—One outside of the true family bonds and relationships. This description has been regarded by expositors as having a double sense. 1. It is a portrait of a harlot, especially one of foreign extraction. 2. It is a representation of the allurements of unsound doctrine and corrupt worship. I. WE HAVE HERE A DESCRIPTION OF THE STRANGE WOMAN. 1. Her vile, unclean, flattering, enticing speech. 2. Her fate: her end bitter, physical suffering, mental anguish, spiritual distress. II. A WORD TO HER. 1. You are somebody's child; think of the old time, &c. 2. You are ruining soul and body. 3. Ruining others as well. 4. The woman that was a sinner found mercy, and there is mercy for you. (*Anon.*) *Evil companionship* :—It would not be complaisance, but cowardice—it would be a sinful softness, which allowed affinity in taste to imperil your faith or your virtue. It would be the same sort of courtesy which in the equatorial forest, for the sake of its beautiful leaf, lets the *liana* with its strangling arms run up the plantain or the orange, and pays the forfeit in blasted boughs and total ruin. It would be the same sort of courtesy which, for fear of appearing rude and inhospitable, took into dock an infested vessel, or welcomed, not as a patient, but a guest, the plague-stricken stranger. (*J. Hamilton, D.D.*) *The consequences of profligacy* :—This chapter consists of caution and warning against licentiousness—the lawless and irregular indulgence of the passions—"Youthful lusts that war against the soul." Inhumanity is the union of two opposite natures—the animal with the impulses and appetites of the brute, the spiritual with Godlike aspirations and capacities of intelligence and religion. Whatever may be the aspirations of the soul, we find there is an animal nature as really and truly "us" as the spiritual itself. In man the conjugal relation is associated with all pure ideas, and is the source and fountain of the purest joy; the family circle is the nursing-mother of all virtue. Licentiousness would subvert all these connections. The Jewish law was so framed as not to suffer any of the daughters of Israel to sink into harlotry; the text speaks of "a strange woman," because such were usually persons from the surrounding nations. 1. There is nothing so expensive as sin. How many constitutions, how many fortunes have been blasted and wasted through early subjugation to lust! 2. God urges obedience to His laws by the happiness, purity, and beauty of a well-ordered, wise, and prudent conjugal connection. The young man is surrounded by God's omniscience. If he does not ponder his ways, God will. Iniquity, and especially sins of this sort, tend to gain a fixed habit. There is nothing so utterly repulsive as the picture of one who has grown old in habits of grossness. (*T. Binney.*) *Her steps take hold on hell.*—*A beautiful hell* :—One memorable night, a young lad and an old Scotchman being in Paris together, found themselves in front of one of the dens of infamy; the fragrance of the spices of Araby seemed to float in the air, and the sound of music and dancing broke upon the ear. The glitter and dazzle of fairyland was at the door; and the Scotch boy said, "What is that?" The body of the friend to whom he spoke now moulders in the dust; the voice that answered is now singing praises to God on high; but the hand of that Scotchman came like a vice to the wrist of the lad who was with him, and the voice hardened to a tone that he never forgot, as he said, "Man, that is hell!" "What!" It was a new idea to the country lad. Hell with an entrance like that!—with all the colours of the rainbow; with all the flowers and beauty, and the witching scenery and attractions! I thought hell was ugly; I thought I would get the belch of sulphur at the pit's mouth; I thought harpies on infernal wing would be hovering above the pit: but here like this? Yes, I saw above the gate—and I knew French enough to know what it meant—"Nothing to pay." That was on the gate; but, though there be nothing to pay to get in, what have you to pay to get out? That is the question. Character blasted! soul lost! Mind that. Just examine your ways. Do not be taken in by the flowers and music, and the beautiful path that is at your feet this afternoon. (*John Robertson.*)

Ver. 6. Her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them.—*The movable ways of the tempter* :—The wise man lets us know how foolish it is for men to flatter themselves with the hope that they shall by and by be truly disposed and enabled to repent of their sin. The temptress can form her mode of behaviour into a hundred shapes to entangle the heart of the lover. She spreads a thousand snares, and if you escape one of them, you will find yourself held fast by another. She knows well how to suit her words and behaviour to your present humour, to lull

conscience asleep, and to spread before your eyes such a mist as shall prevent you from being able to desery the paths of life. If you ever think of the danger of your course, and feel the necessity of changing it, she will urge you to spend a little time longer in the pleasures of sin. If her solicitations prevail, if you linger within the precincts of guilt, your resolutions are weakened, and your passions gain new strength. What is the awful result? The devil obtains more influence; conscience, forcibly repressed, ceases to reclaim with so loud a voice; God gives you up to the lusts of your own heart, and leaves you to choose your own delusions. Attend, then, to the wisest of men, who instructs you to keep free of these dangerous temptations. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *Movableness*:—The text refers to a sinful character who endeavours to keep her companion in vice by her movable ways. Few can say with Paul, "None of these things move me." We are liable to be acted upon by influences within and without us. It is a grave weakness to be easily movable to bad and faulty ways. Movableness is the prevalent fault of probably every one of us. How easily we are moved to speak in haste. How difficult to keep our eye from being moved to look on evil. We are urged to fix our affections on things above, but who can do this in his own strength? Are we not movable in our friendships? Perhaps movable Christians love only themselves; and if this be so, it needs but a short time and a slight ruffle against their feathers to move them. Some are easily movable from their work for God and for humanity. Some, perhaps all of us, at times, are movable in our faith. Do not allow yourself to be moved from trusting in the love of Jesus, and never be ashamed of being His faithful disciple. Some are moved from the comfort of prayer. (*William Birch.*)

Ver. 9. Lest thou give thine honour unto others.—*A man's honour sunk in sensuality*:—A good name is better than precious ointment, but of a good name this abominable sin is the ruin. The credit of David and of Solomon was greatly sunk by it. By it has the honour of thousands been irretrievably lost. Life is a great blessing, and may be regarded as the foundation of every earthly blessing. But unclean persons part with everything that renders life worthy of the name, and in a literal sense, they often give their years unto the cruel. Their lives are lost in the pursuit of this sin by the just judgment of God, by its native consequences, or by the accidents to which it exposes those who practise it. And for what are these years given away? Did men generously part with their lives in the defence of their country, or for the sake of a generous friend, the loss would be amply compensated by honour, and by the pleasure of a good conscience. But how infatuated are they who give their years unto the cruel, who conceal a selfish and malignant heart under the mask of love! All unlawful love is hatred, and all tempters to it are cruel enemies to our happiness. Shall we then gratify inhuman enemies, at the expense of honour and life and everything dear to us? These false friends and malicious enemies rob you of your honour and life, with as much eagerness as if they could enjoy these precious blessings of which you are deprived. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. And thou mourn at the last.—*Dying regrets*:—Religion has one undeniable advantage to recommend it—whatever it calls us to sacrifice or to suffer, it always ends well. On the other hand, sin has one undeniable evil to suffer, it always ends in horror—whatever sensual pleasures and imaginary profit attend its course, it always ends awfully. I. THE SUBJECT OF THESE REGRETS. It is a man who has disregarded through life the means employed to preserve or reclaim him. Man's instructors and reprovers may be ranked in six classes. 1. Your connections in life. Father, mother, friend, &c. 2. The Scriptures. 3. Ministers. 4. Conscience. 5. Irrational creatures. 6. The dispensations of Providence. II. THE PERIOD OF THESE REGRETS. It is a dying hour. 1. Such a period is unavoidable. 2. It cannot be far off. 3. It may be very near. 4. It is sometimes prematurely brought on by sin. Such a period, if it be not prematurely produced by irreligion, is always embittered by it. III. THE NATURE OF THESE REGRETS. This mourning has two attributes to distinguish it. 1. It is dreadful. A dying hour has been called an honest hour. 2. It is useless. To the individuals themselves, whatever it may be to others. Lessons: 1. How good is God! 2. How fallen is man! 3. How important is serious thought! (*William Jay.*) **At the last.**—*Last things*:—The wise man saw the young and simple straying into the house of the strange woman. It was not what it seemed to be. Could he shed

a revealing light upon it? He saw only one lamp suitable to his purpose; it was named "At the last." He held this up, and the young man's delusion was dispelled. He saw in its light the awful consequences of self-indulgence and sin. If this lamp is useful in this one case, it may be useful in others. I can only compare my text in its matchless power to Ithuriel's spear, with which, according to Milton, he touched the toad, and straightway Satan appeared in his true colours. This lamp has four sides to it. I. DEATH IS AT THE LAST. In some sense it is the last of this mortal life; it is the last of this period of trial here below; it is the last of the day of grace; it is the last of the day of mortal sin. In the light of death look upon mortal sins. The greatest of human actions will appear to be insignificant when we come to die. Look at our selfish actions in this light. How will sin then appear? II. JUDGMENT IS AT THE LAST. When we die, we die not. When a man dieth shall he live again? Ay, that he shall—for his spirit dieth never. After death comes the judgment. Look at the past, the present, the future, in the light of that judgment. III. HEAVEN IS AT THE LAST. Look on all our actions in the light of heaven. IV. HELL IS AT THE LAST. See things in that dread and dismal light, the glare of the fiery abyss. How will self-indulgence, unbelief, procrastination look in that light? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **When thy flesh and thy body are consumed.**—*Sin's recompense*:—If all men believed at the beginning of their courses of life what they find at the end, there would be far less power in temptation, and many would turn aside from those paths which bring them to ruin; but it is one of the peculiarities of youth that, while it has unbounded faith in certain directions, it seldom has faith in regard to mischiefs which befall disobedience. There are many reasons which conspire to make men either over-confident in the beginnings of life, or even audacious. 1. The inexperience and thoughtlessness which belong to the young. Thousands there are who have taken no pains in the formation of their consciences. 2. There is a most defiant spirit in the young. 3. There is a hopefulness which frequently goes beyond all bounds. 4. There are reactions from an infelicitous way of teaching which tend to produce presumption in the young. Especially the exaggeration and indiscriminate way in which sin is often held forth. Conventional sins are held up before men as representing sinning, until there comes up a scepticism of the whole doctrine and the whole sad and melancholy experience of sinning. 5. Men are made presumptuous in sinning because they see wicked men prospering. They regard that as the refutation of half the preaching, and of almost all the advice they hear. There is a law of everlasting rectitude. There are conditions on which men's bodies will serve them happily, and there are conditions on which men's souls will serve them happily. But if a man violate these conditions, no matter how secretly, no matter how little, just as sure as there is a God in heaven, he must suffer the penalty. Every one of the wrongs which a man commits against his own soul will find him out, and administer its own penalty. There comes a time when men who are not actually worn out by excess of transgression do regain, to some extent, their moral sense. After the period of infatuation there comes, very frequently, a period of retrospection. It is alluded to in the passage now before us. The resurrection of moral sensibility comes through a variety of agencies—failure, shame, affliction, &c. Sometimes it comes too late. I beseech you, young men, believe in virtue; believe in truth; believe in honesty and fidelity; believe in honour; believe in God; believe in God's law and in God's providence. Put your trust in God, and in the faith of God, and not in the seeming of deceitful and apparently prosperous men. Whatever else you get, have peace, day by day, with your own conscience. Whoever else you offend, do not offend your God. Do what is right, and then fear no man. (*H. W. Beecher.*) *The doom of the libertine*:—I. WASTE OF WEALTH. It is spent to garnish the house of sin; it is so much taken from home-scenes, and legitimate pleasures and benevolence. II. WASTE OF HEALTH. Note the corruption of licentious nations, as the Turks, &c. III. WASTE OF TEARS. Mourning at the last is too late for proving the repentance to be genuine. (*Anon.*) *A dissolute young man*:—

I. A DISSOLUTE YOUNG MAN WITH A DECAYING BODY. The wise man foresaw the wretched physical condition to which the dissolute life of the young man whom he calls his son would lead. 1. It is a sad sight to see a young man decay at all. 2. It is more sad when the physical decay has been produced by a dissolute life. II. A DISSOLUTE YOUNG MAN WITH AN ACTIVE MEMORY. 1. He remembers the many privileges he has abused. 2. He remembers the sinful scenes of his life. III. A DISSOLUTE YOUNG MAN WITH A TORTURING CONSCIENCE. 1. An agonising sense of self-blamefulness. Conscience casts all excuses to the winds; it fastens the crime home on the

individual himself. 2. An agonising sense of self-ruin. The moral wail here breathes the feeling of destruction. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The woes of wantonness* :— I. LAMENTATION FOLLOWS WANTONNESS. 1. When men find their goods gone and their bodies corrupted. 2. When they see all their opportunities of doing good to soul and body gone. 3. They feel God's hand heavy on them, as being on the rack of an evil conscience. II. THE END OF WANTON COURSES IS SORROWFUL. 1. Because of pleasures past. 2. Because of present sorrows. 3. Because of pursuing pain that is gotten by disease. 4. Because of public shame. III. THE BODY ITSELF IS CONSUMED BY WANTONNESS. Because it consumes the radical humour of the body. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 12. And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof.— *Conscience as an instrument of punishment* :—These are supposed to be the words of a young man whose dissolute life had induced disease and want and infamy. He stands out upon the dim verge of life, a beacon light to all who live without God. Remorse, like a fierce vulture, had clutched upon his soul, and despair had cast the shadows of a cheerless night around him. It was from his moral reflections that his keenest anguish arose. I. THE NATURAL AUTHORITY OF CONSCIENCE, AND ITS CONSEQUENT POWER TO INFLICT PUNISHMENT. 1. If we would appreciate the capacity of the soul to suffer through the morbid action of the moral feelings, we must first understand its internal structure, its several faculties and powers. Man is endowed with various powers of reason, of sensibility, and of action. Of the principles of action, some are mechanical, as instinct and habit; some are animal, as the appetites and some of the desires and affections; and others rational, arising from a knowledge of his relations to other beings, and from a foresight of the proper consequences of his acts. He thus combines in his nature those laws which govern the brute creation with those which declare him to be made in the "image of God," and suit him to a state of moral discipline. With this complex nature he is endowed with the power of self-government, which implies the due exercise of all the properties of his being, under the direction and control of one supreme authority. This authority is conscience, which God has enthroned in the human breast with all the attributes of sovereignty. The brute animal rushes on to the gratification of its desires without a thought beyond the immediate object in pursuit. Man brings under his eye the just relations of universal being, chooses and pursues. 2. Consider what a monitor conscience is. It teaches us to perform in good faith, as being right, that which we do; but it does not of itself supply an independent rule of right. 3. The government of conscience is not like that of the animal appetites. Its voice is gentle and persuasive, often drowned in the clamour of passion, or unheeded in the eager pursuit of forbidden pleasure. 4. If conscience is supreme, according to the original constitution of our nature, then, whatever may be the occasional, temporary abuse it may receive from the usurpation of the animal propensities, it must upon the whole, and taking all the range of our existence into the account, possess an ascendant power over man. 5. Go where you will, the natural dread of an accusing conscience will be found to have been the rod of terror to the guilty of all ages. No man will long abide the direct action of self-reproach. The restlessness of the soul, under the action of self-reproach, has displayed itself upon a wide scale in the cumbrous and often sanguinary superstitions of the heathen. We have seen the distress and anguish which a sense of guilt produces in the breast of the awakened sinner. II. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE PUNITIVE ACTION OF CONSCIENCE. In relation to God, a consciousness of guilt is accompanied—1. With a sense of the loss of Divine favour and fellowship. 2. A sense of guilt is accompanied with an apprehension of punishment. In the breast of every man there exists a belief that this world is under a providential government, from the just awards of which he has something to hope or to fear in a future state of being. In relation to other moral beings, a sense of guilt is accompanied with—(1) A loss of the confidence and esteem of the holy. (2) A consciousness of guilt awakens remorse, a complex emotion, consisting of simple regret and moral disapprobation of one's self; in other words, it is moral regret. Practical considerations: 1. How delusive is that hope of future happiness which, though it is built upon the natural goodness of God, manifested through a Mediator, makes no necessary reckoning of a holy life. It is not in the province of Omnipotence to produce moral happiness in a polluted soul. 2. We here perceive the reasonableness as well as certainty of future punishment. (*Freeborn C. Hibbard, M.A.*) *Woman's lamentation over a wasted life* :—Women outnumber men in the family, in the Church, in the State.

A God-loving, God-fearing womanhood will make a God-loving, God-fearing nationality. 1. A young woman who omits her opportunity of making home happy. 2. A young woman who spends her whole life, or wastes her young womanhood, in selfish display. 3. A young woman who wastes her opportunity of doing good. 4. A young woman who loses her opportunity of personal salvation. Opportunity gone, is gone for ever. Privileges wasted, wasted for ever. The soul lost, lost for ever. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *Self-condemnations*:—I. SENSUALISTS WILL BE SELF-CONDEMNED IN THE END. 1. Because of the issue of sin in general, which must come to a self-condemnation. 2. Because of the strength of their sorrow arising out of their troubles. 3. Because of the force of truth, which will overcome all in the end. 4. Because of the power of conscience. II. THAT WHICH LIES SOREST UPON THE SPIRITS OF GROSS SINNERS IN THE END IS, SLIGHTING INSTRUCTION. 1. Because it is a great mercy for God to afford teachers. 2. Because not hearkening to instruction is the way to fall into sin, and not hearkening to reproof the way to abide in it. III. WICKED MEN HEARTILY HATE INSTRUCTION AND SLIGHT REPROOF. 1. Because they are contrary to their corrupt affections and wicked lusts. 2. It appears that they heartily hate them by the malice they bear to the reprovers of their sins, which is vehement and deadly. Their lusts are so strong on them that they hate and slight all reproofs. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 13. And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers.—*Consequences of disobedience*:—Can any state be more distressing than that of an individual who has enjoyed the best opportunities of securing his own happiness and promoting that of others, totally failing in both these, and becoming the subject of bitter self-reproach? I. THERE IS THE ADMISSION OF HAVING HAD THE GREAT ADVANTAGE OF TEACHERS. There are scarcely any but have had some very considerable advantages and means of religious instruction. They involve you all in a serious responsibility to God and your own conscience. 1. The best, purest, most commanding instruction in the Bible. 2. The living voice of teachers, either parents or ministers, or kind friends in schools. 3. The Spirit of God unfolding the truth to your understanding and conscience; striving with your heart, and inwardly calling you to seek those things which belong to your peace. II. THERE IS AN IMPLIED CONNECTION BETWEEN INSTRUCTION AND OBEDIENCE. The text admits the obligation resulting from such advantages. "I ought to have obeyed, but I have not." 1. You are bound to obey the good instruction you have received, because it is clearly the will of God, the Being who is above all, and who holds you amenable at His tribunal. 2. By the tender and unspeakable love of the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who came forth from His Father, and became the Redeemer of men by the sacrifice of Himself. 3. By a regard to your own highest interests. Obeying the Divine precepts is the only way to secure your own peace of mind, your joy through life, your hope in death, and your immortal felicity after death. 4. By a regard to the interests of others to whom you may be related in this life. You have social relations, duties, and obligations which you ought to regard, and cannot neglect without great criminality. You ought to become yourselves, and endeavour to make them, such as God would have us all to be. 5. By the obligation which arises from your final accountableness at the bar of judgment. III. THERE IS A CONFESSION THAT INSTRUCTION HAD NOT BEEN OBEYED. This text does not express the case of those who have only partially, or in some respects, failed of obedience, but have in the main been mindful of the instruction they have received. It is applied to those who have failed altogether, and in the general habits of their mind and life have disregarded the great and holy principles inculcated upon them in early life. Some of the causes of this failure are—1. There is in our own hearts a disinclination to serve God, and an aversion to the Divine precepts. 2. There are innumerable and incessant temptations to forsake the guide of our youth. 3. There will be a direct and powerful influence of the worst kind exerted over those who give themselves to evil companions. IV. THERE IS AN EXPRESSION OF PENITENTIAL REGRET FOR DISOBEDIENCE. The text seems to be the language of remorse. 1. A perception that our misery has resulted from wilful disobedience, not from ignorance. 2. The feeling that this disobedience has been maintained against light and knowledge. 3. The consciousness that you once possessed all the means necessary to promote your happiness and secure your salvation. (*The Evangelist.*)

Ver. 15. Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.—*Spiritual resources*:—I. MAN HAS INDEPENDENT SPIRITUAL

RESOURCES. 1. He has independent sources of thought. Every sane man can and does think for himself. 2. He has independent sources of experience. No two have exactly the same experience. 3. He has independent powers of usefulness. Every man has a power to do some thing which no other can. **II. MAN IS BOUND TO USE THESE RESOURCES.** "Drink waters out of thine own cistern." Do not live on others' self-drawing. 1. Honours our own nature. 2. Increases our own resources. 3. Contributes to the good of the universe. The man who gives only what he has borrowed from others adds nothing to the common stock. The subject—(1) Indicates the kind of service which one man can spiritually render another. (2) Suggests an effective method to sap the foundation of all arrogant assumptions. Let every man become self-helpful, and the influence of those who arrogate a lordship over the faith of others will soon die out. (3) Presents a motive for thankfully adoring the great Creator for the spiritual constitution He has given us. We have resources, not of course independent of "Him," the primal fount of all power, but independent of all creatures. (*Homilist.*) **Family joys** :—A painter lays down a dark ground to lean his picture on, and thereby bring its beauty out. Such is the method adopted in this portion of the Word. The pure delights of the family are about to be represented in the sweetest colours that nature yields—wedded love mirrored in running waters; surely we have apples of gold in pictures of silver here. And in all the earlier part of the chapter the Spirit has stained the canvas deep with Satan's dark antithesis to the holy appointment of God. The Lord condescends to bring His own institute forward in rivalry with the deceitful pleasures of sin. How beautiful and how true the imagery in which our lesson is unfolded! Pleasures such as God gives to His creatures, and such as His creatures, with advantage to all their interests can enjoy—pleasures that are consistent with holiness and heaven, are compared to a stream of pure running water. And specifically the joys of the family are "running waters out of thine own well." This well is not exposed to every passenger. It springs within, and has a fence around it. We should make much of the family and all that belongs to it. All its accessories are the Father's gift, and He expects us to observe and value them. But because the stream is so pure, a small bulk of foreign matter will sensibly tinge it. The unguarded word, neglected thoughtfulnesses, or slovenly and careless ways. But careful abstinence from evil is only one, and that the lower, side of the case. There must be spontaneous outgoing activity in this matter, like the springing of flowers, and the leaping of a stream from the fountain. All the allusions to this relation in Scripture imply an ardent, joyful love. Husband and wife, if they are skilful to take advantage of their privileges, may, by sharing, somewhat diminish their cares, and fully double their joys. But we must take care lest the enjoyments of home become a snare. God is not pleased with indolence or selfishness. If the family is well ordered, ourselves will get the chief benefit, but we should let others share it. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad.—*The children of marriage* :—Streams of children. Unlawful intercourse is often barren. **I. CHILDREN OF LAWFUL MARRIAGE ARE LIKE RIVERS.** 1. In plenty. God's blessing goes with marriage. 2. In purity. Pure fountains bring forth pure streams. 3. In spreading abroad. 4. In profitableness. **II. CHILDREN ARE A GREAT PART OF THE COMFORTS OF MARRIAGE.** 1. Because they are a part of both their parents. 2. Because they are a firm bond of love, peace, and reconciliation to both their parents. **III. PARENTS NEED NOT BE ASHAMED OF THEIR CHILDREN.** 1. Because they come into the world God's way, and that brings no shame with it. 2. Because there is hope that they will be good. 3. Being well-bred, they may come to preferment in the State. 4. They are likely to have honourable posterity. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 17. Let them be only thine own, and not strangers' with thee.—*Strangers with thee* :—Strangers with thee in life! Those united in Christ are those only who are united in truth. Strangers with thee in death! Alone wilt thou descend the banks of that dark river. For be assured the hosts of darkness and sin flee terror-stricken from its waters. The Lord and the Church are with them; but "strangers with thee." Strangers with thee in eternity! There the little finesses and shams by which rivalry and hatred are concealed in this life will be torn away, and the naked energies of sin will stand isolated and single in their intense and repulsive malignity. "Strangers with thee." (*Episcopal Recorder.*)

Ver. 21. For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord.—*The method of Providence for restraining evil*:—God announces Himself the witness and judge of man. The evil-doer can neither elude the all-seeing eye, nor escape from the almighty hand. Secrecy is the study and the hope of the wicked. A sinner's chief labour is to hide his sin, and his labour is all lost. Darkness hideth not from God. He who knows evil in its secret source is able to limit the range of its operation. There is a special method by which this is done. It is a principle of the Divine government that sin becomes the instrument for punishing sinners. His own sin is the snare that takes the transgressor, and the scourge that lashes him. The Maker and Ruler of all things has set in the system of the universe a self-acting apparatus, which is constantly going for the encouragement of good and the repression of evil. The providential laws are directed against the current of man's sinful propensities, and tell in force thereon. They do not, however, overcome and neutralise, and reverse those propensities. Retribution in the system of nature, set in motion by the act of sin, is like the "Virgin's kiss" in the Roman Inquisition. The step of him who goes forward to kiss the image touches a secret spring, and the statue's marble arms enclose him in a deadly embrace, piercing his body through with a hundred knives. Verily a man under law to God needs to "ponder his feet." (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Man's ways before God*:—Everybody can see the cedar of Lebanon, the pine of the forest, or the hedge with its convolvulus and wild rose. They can even see the daisy, the flower in the grass. But who sees the grass? He who made the grass to grow upon the mountain, He knows every blade of it, and for every blade has recognition, sunshine, and dew. So is it with the lowliest and humblest man in this world to-day. God's eye loves goodness; He delights in it; and there is no goodness which He fails to recognise and bless. (*W. L. Watkinson.*)

Ver. 22. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself.—*Man as known by God and punished by sin*:—I. MAN AS KNOWN BY GOD. The fact that God knows man thoroughly, if practically realised, will have a fourfold effect upon the soul. 1. It will stimulate to great spiritual activity. 2. It will restrain from the commission of sin. 3. It will excite the desire for pardon. 4. It will brace the soul in the performance of duty. II. MAN AS PUNISHED BY SIN. As virtue is its own reward, so sin is its own punishment. Sin punishing the sinner. 1. It will seize him as its victim. 2. It will arrest him in his career. Illustrate Belshazzar. 3. It will detach him from his comrades. 4. It will bind him as its prisoner. There are the "cords" of causation; the "cords" of habit; and the "cords" of despair. 5. It will exclude him from knowledge. 6. It banishes him as an exile. "In the greatness of his folly he shall go astray." Sin banishes the soul from virtue, heaven, God; and reduces it to a homeless, friendless orphan in the universe. "The seeds of our own punishment," says Hesiod, "are sown at the same time we commit sin." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The apprehending nature of sin*:—Nothing is so deceptive as sin. Nothing so cruel and unrelenting. Nothing so ruinous and destructive. Some think that sin is a single act, and that it passes away with the doing. I. SIN WILL SURELY FIND OUT THE SINNER. Conscience is one of its officers. The consequences of sin lay hold of the sinner. No man can escape from himself. II. SIN WILL SURELY BRING THE SINNER TO JUDGMENT. He must answer for his wrong doing and wrong thinking. In his personal experience something declares against the sinner. It causes a disharmony of one's nature. At the bar of judgment a penalty is declared. The judgment is a self-condemnation. The penalty will enforce itself. III. THE CORDS OF SIN WILL HOLD THE SINNER. He cannot free himself from them. His very being is bound and fettered with an adamant chain. Sin can never exhaust itself. Continual sinning involves continual penalty. Sin presents only a hopeless aspect. Turning to himself, man turns only to despair. Practical lessons—1. We should not cherish slighting views of sin. 2. We should heartily loathe and detest it. 3. We should humbly resort to the only, the gospel, remedy for sin. Christ is the only emancipator from its terrible power. Only through personal faith in Christ can any guilty soul realise salvation. (*Daniel Rogers, D.D.*) *Sinners bound with the cords of sin*:—The first sentence of this verse has reference to a net, in which birds or beasts are taken. That which first attracted the sinner afterwards detains him. This first sentence may have reference to an arrest by an officer of law. The transgressor's own sin shall take him, shall seize him; they bear a warrant for arresting him, they shall judge him, they shall even execute him.

The second sentence speaks of the sinner being holden with cords. The lifelong occupation of the ungodly man is to twist ropes of sin. The binding meant is that of a culprit pinioned for execution. Iniquity pinions a man. Make a man's will a prisoner, and he is a captive indeed. Who would not scorn to make himself a slave to his baser passions? And yet the mass of men are such—the cords of their sins bind them. I. THE CAPTIVATING, ENSLAVING POWER OF SIN IS A SOLUTION TO A GREAT MYSTERY. 1. Is it not mysterious that men should be content to abide in a state of imminent peril? 2. Before long unconverted men and women will be in a state whose wretchedness it is not possible for language fully to express. 3. Is it not a wonder that men do not receive the gospel of Jesus Christ, seeing that the gospel is so plain? 4. Nay, moreover, so infinitely attractive. 5. The commandment of the gospel is not burdensome. 6. And, according to the confession of most sinners, the pleasures of sin are by no means great. Here stands the riddle, man is so set against God and His Christ that he never will accept eternal salvation until the Holy Spirit, by a supernatural work, overcomes his will and turns the current of his affections. II. THOUGH THIS IS THE SOLUTION OF ONE MYSTERY, IT IS IN ITSELF A GREATER MYSTERY. One reason why men receive not Christ is, that they are hampered by the sin of forgetting God. Another sin binds all unregenerate hearts; it is the sin of not loving the Christ of God. What a mystery it is that men should be held by the sin of neglecting their souls! (C. H. Spurgeon.)

The lot of the wicked:—I. WICKED MEN HURT THEMSELVES MORE THAN OTHERS CAN.

1. By their sins they set all their enemies at liberty. 2. Their plots for the ruin of others for the most part light on themselves. II. WICKED MEN ARE TAKEN IN THE

SNARES OF THEIR OWN SINS. 1. The guilt of their sins follows them wherever they go.

2. God's wrath and curse follow upon sin. 3. God delivers sinners over to Satan. 4. Punishment attends on sin. III. THE SNARES OF WICKED MEN'S SINS WILL HOLD THEM FAST.

1. The custom of sinning becomes another nature. 2. God ties the sinner fast to eternal punishment by his sins, and for his sins, giving him over to a reprobate sense, and by His power, as by chains, keeping him in prison till the great judgment. (Francis Taylor, B.D.) *The sinner self-imprisoned*:—

At one time many convicts were employed in building high walls round the prison grounds at Portland. Soldiers posted above them with loaded guns watched them at their work. Every brick laid rendered their escape more impossible, and yet they themselves were laying them. And he shall be holden with the cords of his

sins.—*Sinful habits*:—I. THEIR FORMATION. 1. One sin leads to another by reducing the sense of odiousness. 2. By strengthening wrong principles. 3. By rendering falsehood necessary for purposes of concealment. 4. By multiplying opportunities for commission. 5. By lessening the power of resistance. II. THEIR POWER.

1. As seen in the criminal. 2. The drunkard. 3. The swindler. 4. The errorist. 5. The gospel-despiser. Apply—(1) Beware what habits we form. (2) Mark the increased difficulty of conversion. (3) Watch over the religious education of the young; the formation of early habits. (G. Brooks.) *The self-propagating*

power of sin:—In Scripture, Divine providence and the results of sin are often brought into immediate and close connection with each other, as if the pain

attendant on sin were a direct act of God. But there are other passages where sin is looked at, as bringing its own punishment with it by the law of the world

analogous to the physical laws of nature. In the text the results of sin are represented as taking place in the natural order of things. The sinner thinks that sin

is over and gone when it is once committed. If you put a Divine punisher of sin out of sight, sin does the work of the executioner on the sinner. Among these

consequences of sin certain ones are often insisted upon—such as bodily evils, loss of temporal advantages, fear of the wrath of God. But there is a far more awful

view of sin, when we look at it on the moral side, as propagating itself, becoming more intense, tending to blacken and corrupt the whole character, and to annihilate

the hopes and powers of the soul. See some of the laws of character to which these consequences of sin can be reduced. I. THE DIRECT POWER OF SIN TO PROPAGATE

ITSELF IN THE INDIVIDUAL SOUL. Sin is the most fruitful of all parents; each new sin is a new ever-flowing source of corruption, and there is no limit to the issue of death. 1. Note the law of habit, or the tendency of a certain

kind of sin to produce another of the same kind. This law reigns over every act, quality, or state, of the soul, to render the sinful act easier, to intensify

the desire, to destroy the impression of danger, to increase the spirit of neglect and delay. Illustrate by the internal affection of envy, or an external habit, such as

some sensual appetite. 2. The tendency of a sin of one kind to produce sins of

another kind. The confederacy of powers in man admits of no separate action of any one wayward impulse, but as soon as evil in one shape appears, it tends to corrupt all the parts of the soul, to disorganise, to reduce other powers under its own control, and to weaken those which resist. One sort of sin puts the body or soul, or both, into such a state, that another sort becomes more easy and natural. There is an affinity between bodily lusts. Any one of them tends to derange the soul by a loss of inward peace. One wrong affection renders another easier. Even an absorbing passion, like covetousness or ambition, though it may exclude some other inconsistent passion, does not reign alone, but has around and behind it a gloomy train of satellites, which are little tyrants in turn. A more striking example of the connection between different kinds of sin is seen when a man resorts to a new kind of sin to save himself from the effects of the first. Another dark shade is thrown over the malignity of sin from the fact that it so often makes use of innocent motives to propagate its power over the soul. II. THE TENDENCY OF SIN TO PRODUCE MORAL BLINDNESS. Sin freely chosen must needs seek for some justification or palliation; otherwise the moral sense is aroused, and the soul is filled with pain and alarm. Such justification cannot be found in moral or religious truth, and of this the soul is more or less distinctly aware. Hence an instinctive dread of truth and a willingness to receive and embrace plausible, unsound excuses for sin, which neutralise or destroy its power. The ways in which this overthrow of unperverted judgments, this rejection of light, tends to strengthen the power of sin, are manifold. It decreases the restraining and remedial power of conscience; it kills the sense of danger, and even adds hopefulness to sin; it destroys any influence which the beauty and glory of truth could put forth; in short, it removes those checks from prudence, from the moral powers, and from the character of God, which retard the career of sin. III. SIN TENDS TO BENUMB AND ROOT OUT THE SENSIBILITIES. This view of sin shows it in its true light as a perverter of nature, an overturner of all those particular traits, the union of which, under love to God, makes the harmony and beauty of the soul. IV. SIN CRIPPLES THE POWER OF THE WILL TO UNDERTAKE A REFORM. There are cases, very frequent in life, which show a will so long overcome by the strength of sin and by ill-success in opposing it, that the purpose of reform is abandoned in despair. The outcries of human nature under this bondage of sin are tragic indeed. V. SIN PROPAGATES ITSELF BY MEANS OF THE TENDENCY OF MEN TO ASSOCIATE WITH PERSONS OF LIKE CHARACTER, AND TO AVOID THE COMPANY OF PERSONS OF AN OPPOSITE CHARACTER. In the operation of this law of companionship the evil have a power, and an increasing power, over each other. The worst maxims and the worst opinions prevail, for they are a logical result of evil characters. In conclusion, with the justice or goodness of this system I have at present nothing to do. The Bible did not set it on foot, the Bible does not fully explain it, but only looks at it as a dark fact. Sin does not cure itself or pave the way toward truth and right. The question still is this—Is there any cure? If there be any cure it must be found outside of the region which sin governs. I call on you, then, to find out for yourself a cure. I offer you one—Christ and His gracious Spirit. (T. D. Woolsey.)

Ver. 23. *He shall die without instruction.*—*The great charity of early instruction:*—All persons are born in a state of ignorance and darkness as to spiritual things; therefore all young persons need instruction. Good instruction in youth is God's appointed means to bring men to the saving knowledge of Himself, and the attainment of salvation. The neglect of early instruction and good education is the ruin of many a person in both worlds. They live viciously and die desperately; they pass from the errors and works of darkness to the place of utter and eternal darkness. They die without instruction, and go astray, and perish in their ignorance and folly. The time of youth is the most proper time in nature for good instructions; children are apt to catch at everything they hear, and to retain it and repeat it. Their faculties are fresh and vigorous, and they are void of those prejudices against truth and virtue which they are afterwards likely to take up. 1. Children cannot live as Christians if they know not the fundamentals of the Christian religion. A man can act no better than his principles dictate to him. 2. For want of being grounded in the essentials of Christian doctrine, young people are easily led into error or heresy. 3. These undisciplined persons usually prove ill members of the State, and the very pest of the neighbourhood in which they live. 4. These untaught people bring a reproach on our religion and the Church of Christ amongst us. 5. The God who made them will surely reject them at last. Then gaining

efficiency in the religious education of our young people is supremely to be desired. (*Josiah Woodward, D.D.*) In the greatness of his folly he shall go astray.—*The greatness of the sinner's folly*:—I. YOU DENY BOLDLY THE EXISTENCE OF A GOD. You believe the world fatherless and forsaken; itself eternal, or the product of chance. By your creed you profess to be, or at least to know, the very God whose existence you so madly deny. In the greatness of your folly you arrogate to yourselves the very perfections of Divinity, while a God is denied. II. APPLY THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TEXT TO THE CHARACTER AND HISTORY OF A DEIST. You admit the existence of a Supreme Being, but you deny that the Scripture is His Word. The work of His hands is your only Bible, the dictates of your unenlightened conscience your only law. III. APPLY TO THE CHARACTER AND HISTORY OF THE UNDECIDED. The man who allows the truth of the Bible, but lives and feels as if it were false. Such conduct is full of contradictions. (*J. Angus, M.A.*) *The ways and issues of sin*:—It is the task of the wise teacher to lay bare with an unsparing hand—(1) The fascinations of sin; (2) the deadly entanglements in which the sinner involves himself. I. THE GLAMOURS OF SIN AND THE SAFEGUARD AGAINST THEM. There is no sin which affords so vivid an example of seductive attraction at the beginning, and of hopeless misery at the end, as that of unlawful love. The safeguard against the specific sin before us is presented in a true and whole-hearted marriage. And the safeguard against all sin is equally to be found in the complete and constant preoccupation of the soul with the Divine love. Forbidding to marry is a device of Satan; anything which tends to degrade or desecrate marriage bears on its face the mark of the tempter. Our sacred writings glorify marriage, finding in it more than any other wisdom or religion has found. II. THE BINDING RESULTS OF SIN. Compare the Buddhistic doctrine of Karma. Buddha in effect taught, "You are in slavery to a tyrant set up by yourself. Your own deeds, words, and thoughts, in the former and present states of being, are your own avengers through a countless series of lives. Thou wilt not find a place where thou canst escape the force of thy own evil actions." The Bible says, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sin." This is illustrated in the sin of sensuality. There are four miseries, comparable to four strong cords, which bind the unhappy transgressor. 1. There is the shame. 2. The loss of wealth. 3. The loss of health. 4. The bitter remorse, the groaning and the despair at the end of the shortened life. And there is an inevitableness about it all. By the clearest interworking of cause and effect, these fetters of sin grow upon the feet of the sinner. Our evil actions, forming evil habits, working ill results on us and on others, are themselves the means of our punishment. It is not that God punishes, sin punishes; it is not that God makes hell, sinners make it. This is established by the possible observation of life, by a concurrent witness of all teachers and all true religions. Sin may be defined as "the act of a human will which, being contrary to the Divine will, reacts with inevitable evil upon the agents." 1. Every sin prepares for us a band of shame to be wound about our brows and tightened to the torture-point. 2. Every sin is preparing for us a loss of wealth, the only wealth which is really durable, the treasure in the heavens. 3. Every sin is the gradual undermining of the health, not so much the body's as the soul's health. 4. The worst chain forged in the furnace of sin is remorse; for no one can guarantee to the sinner an eternal insensibility. Memory will be busy. Here, then, is the plain, stern truth, a law, not of nature only, but of the universe. How men need One who can take away the sin of the world, One who can break those cruel bonds which men have made for themselves! (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *The martyr of guilt*:—Sin is an evil of fearful tendencies, and necessarily productive, if unchecked, of remediless consequences. The reason is obvious. Moral evil corrupts and vitiates the mind itself, carries the contagion of a mortal disease through all its affections and powers, and affects the moral condition of the man through the whole duration of his being. I. THE VIEWS IT AFFORDS OF THE POWER AND PROGRESS OF EVIL IN THE HUMAN MIND. 1. It ensnares. Reference is to the methods adopted in the East by those who hunt for game, or for beasts of prey. Evil allures under the form of good. All the way is white as snow that hides the pit. 2. It enslaves. St. Paul speaks of the "bondage of corruption," and of the hardening of the heart through the deceitfulness of sin. Sin gathers strength from custom, and spreads like a leprosy from limb to limb. The power of habit turns upon the principle that what we have done once we have an aptitude to do again with greater readiness and pleasure. The next temptation finds the sons of folly an easier prey than before. 3. It infatuates. After a season, wickedness so far extends its power from the

passions to the understanding that men become blind to the amount of their own depravity, and in this state begin to fancy music in their chains. It would seem to be one of the prerogatives of sin, like the fascination of the serpent, first to deprive its victims of their senses and then make them an unresisting prey. Guard against the beginnings of sin. Sin prepares for sin. 4. It destroys. The soul is destroyed, not as to the fact of its continued existence, but as to all its Godlike capacities of honour and happiness. II. SOME OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF AGGRAVATION WHICH WILL TEND TO EMBITTER THE SINNER'S DOOM. It must for ever be a melancholy subject of reflection—1. That the ruin was self-caused. A man may be injured by the sins of others, but his soul can be permanently endangered only by his own. By a fine personification, a man's sins are here described as a kind of personal property and possession. Sin, remorse, and death may be deemed a kind of creation of our own. 2. That the objects were worthless and insignificant for which the blessings of salvation were resigned. 3. That you possessed an ample sufficiency of means for your guidance and direction into the path of life. 4. That the evil incurred is hopeless and irremediable. III. THE INTERESTING ASPECT UNDER WHICH THIS SUBJECT TEACHES US TO CONTEMPLATE THE DIVINE DISPENSATIONS. It illustrates—1. The riches of God's mercy in forgiving sin. 2. The power of His grace in subduing sin. 3. The wisdom of His providence in preventing sin. 4. The urgency of His invitations to those who are the slaves of sin. (*Samuel Thodey.*) *Fixed habits*:—A rooted habit becomes a governing principle. Every lust we entertain deals with us as Delilah did with Samson—not only robs us of our strength, but leaves us fast bound. (*Abp. Tillotson.*)

CHAPTER VI.

VERS. 1-5. If thou be surety for thy friend.—*Social suretyships*.—The principles of domestic, social, and political economy in the Bible are far more wise, as well as righteous, than can be found in human book or periodical. I. SURETYSHIP AS AN EVIL TO BE DEPLORED. "If thou be surety"; as if he had said, "It is a sad thing if thou hast." It is not, however, always an evil. There are two things necessary to render it justifiable. 1. The case should be deserving. 2. You should be fully competent to discharge the obligation. But the most deserving men will seldom ask for suretyships, and the most competent men will seldom undertake the responsibility. II. SURETYSHIP AS AN EVIL VERY EASILY CONTRACTED. Merely "striking the hand," and uttering the "words." One word, the word "Yes," will do it, written or uttered in the presence of a witness. Plausibility will soon extract it from a pliant and generous nature. III. SURETYSHIP AS AN EVIL TO BE STRENUOUSLY REMOVED. "Deliver thyself." 1. Do it promptly. Try by every honest means to get the bond back again. 2. Do it beseechingly. "Humble thyself." It is no use to carry a high hand; thou art in his power. 3. Do it effectively. Thou art encaged in iron law; break loose honourably somehow, and be free. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) **If thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger.**—*Striking the hand*:—A surety is one who becomes security for a debt due by another. The customary or legal forms which render suretyship valid differ in different countries. Allusion here is to the practice of the surety confirming his engagement by giving his hand to the creditor, in presence of witnesses. The prohibition must not be taken as unqualified. There are cases in which suretyship is unavoidable. The law sometimes requires it. But the less of it the better. I. IT IS WRONG FOR A MAN TO COME UNDER ENGAGEMENTS THAT ARE BEYOND HIS ACTUALLY EXISTING MEANS. Such a course is not merely imprudent; there is in it a threefold injustice. 1. To the creditor for whom he becomes surety, inasmuch as the security is fallacious, not covering the extent of the risk. 2. To his family, to whom the payment may bring distress and ruin. 3. To those who give him credit in his own transactions; for, in undertaking suretyships, he involves himself in the risks of other trades besides his own. II. IT IS WRONG TO MAKE ENGAGEMENTS WITH INCONSIDERATION AND RASHNESS. The case here treated is that of suretyship for a friend to a stranger; and the rashness and haste may be viewed in relation either to the person or to the case. Men, when they feel the generous impulse of friendly emotion, are apt to think at the moment only of themselves, as if the risk were all their own, and to forget that they are making creditors and family securities, without asking their

consent, or making them aware of their risks. Suretyships for strangers are specially condemned. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Debtors and creditors* :—The friend of the surety here is the debtor, the stranger is the creditor. I. THE SCRIPTURE AFFORDS DIRECTION FOR TRADING AND CIVIL CONVERSE. 1. For wariness in suretyship here. 2. For faithfulness in dealing elsewhere. But why does the wise man concern himself with such matters. Because—1. Religion guides best in civil matters. 2. The eighth commandment requires care of our estates. 3. The Church consists of families and traders which cannot be upheld without care. 4. Religion is ill spoken of for the careless ruin of professors' estates. Then follow Scripture precedents in trading rather than corrupt men's examples. II. YOUNG MEN SHOULD BE ADVISED BY THEIR ELDERS IN WORLDLY AFFAIRS. They have more knowledge and more experience than younger men. III. RASH SURETYSHIP IS TO BE AVOIDED. "Go to the pleading-place (forum), and among frequent contenders nothing is more frequently heard, than the dangers of suretyship, and the sighings of the surety." 1. Be not bound for more than thou canst spare from thy trade and charge. 2. Be not bound for idle persons, that are likely to leave thee in the lurch, and can show no likelihood of ever paying. There be honest poor men enough that will need thy help in this kind. Thou needest not to bestow thy means on prodigals. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Lending money on interest* :—When the Mosaic law was instituted, commerce had not been taken up by the Israelites, and the lending of money on interest for its employment in trade was a thing unknown. The only occasion for loans would be to supply the immediate necessities of the borrower, and the exaction of interest under such circumstances would be productive of great hardship, involving the loss of land, and even of personal freedom, as the insolvent debtor and his family became the slaves of the creditor (*Neh. v. 1-5*). To prevent these evils, the lending of money on interest to any poor Israelite was strictly forbidden (*Lev. xxv.*) ; the people were enjoined to be liberal, and to lend for nothing in such cases. But at the time of Solomon, when the commerce of the Israelites was enormously developed, and communications were opened with Spain and Egypt, and possibly with India and Ceylon, while caravans penetrated beyond the Euphrates, then the lending of money on interest for employment in trade most probably became frequent, and suretyship also—the pledging of a man's own credit to enable his friend to procure a loan. (*Ellicott's Commentary.*) *Certain examples of the binding character of our own actions* :—The surety. The sluggard. The worthless person. I. THE SURETY. The young man, finding his neighbour in monetary difficulties, consents in an easy-going way to become his surety ; enters into a solemn pledge with the creditor, probably a Phœnician money-lender. He now stands committed. His peace of mind and his welfare depend no longer upon himself, but upon the character, the weakness, the caprice, of another. A young man who has so entangled himself is advised to spare no pains, and to let no false pride prevent his securing release from his obligation. There may, however, be cases in which a true brotherliness will require us to be surety for our friend. Ecclesiasticus says : "An honest man is surety for his neighbour, but he that is impudent will forsake him." If we can afford to be a surety for our neighbour, we can clearly afford to lend him the money ourselves. A miserable chain thoughtlessness in the matter of suretyship may forge for the thoughtless. II. THE SLUGGARD. Poverty and ruin must eventually overtake him. In every community there is a certain number of people who are constitutionally incapable. Examples of insect life are brought to teach and stimulate human beings. III. THE WORTHLESS CHARACTER. His heart is as deceitful as his lips : he cannot be true on any terms. This kind of man is the pest of commerce ; the bane of every social circle ; the leaven of hypocrisy and malice in the Christian Church. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise.—*Little preachers and great sermons* :—There is a twofold revelation of God—in the Bible and in nature. In relation to this revelation, men divide into three classes—1. Those who study neither. Their intellects are submerged in animalism and worldliness. 2. Those who study one and disparage the other. Some devout Christians regard nature as not sufficiently sacred and religious for their investigation. Some scientific men try to turn the results of their researches against the Bible. 3. Those who reverentially study the teachings of both. They treat them as volumes from the same Author. The allusion in the text shows that the Bible encourages the study of nature. 1. It sends us to nature in order to attest its first principles. 2. It refers us to nature for illustrations of its great truths.

3. It refers us to nature in order to reprove the sins it denounces. To reprove us for our spiritual indolence it directs us to the ants. The sluggard we now deal with is the spiritual sluggard, not the secularly indolent man, but the man who is neglecting the culture of his own spiritual nature and the salvation of his own soul. The ants teach these important lessons. I. THAT THE FEEBLENESS OF YOUR POWER IS NO JUST REASON FOR YOUR INDOLENCE. The ants are feeble, but see how they work. Naturalists have shown their ingenuity as architects, their industry as miners and builders. Remember three things—1. All power, however feeble, is given for work. 2. You are not required to do more than you have power to accomplish. 3. All power increases by use. II. THAT THE ACTIVITY OF OTHERS IS NO JUST EXCUSE FOR YOUR INDOLENCE. In the ant-world you will see millions of inhabitants, but not one idler; all are in action. One does not depend upon another, or expect another to do his work. The Christian world is a scene of action, but not one of the million actors can do your work. III. THAT THE WANT OF A HELPER IS NO JUST EXCUSE FOR YOUR INDOLENCE. Each ant is thrown upon his own resources and powers. Self-reliantly each labours on, not waiting for the instruction or guidance of another. Trust your own instincts; act out your own powers; use the light you have; look to God for help. IV. THAT THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD IS NO JUST REASON FOR YOUR INDOLENCE. God provides for His creatures through the use of their own powers. He does not do for any creature what He has given that creature power to do for himself. 1. Like these little ants, you have a future. 2. Like these little creatures, you have to prepare for the future. 3. Like these little creatures, you have a specific time in which to make preparation. Then do not talk of Providence as an excuse for your indolence. He has provided for you richly, but He only grants the provision on condition of the right employment of your powers. There is an inheritance for the good, but only on condition of their working. There is a heaven of knowledge, but only for the student. There is a harvest of blessedness, but only to the diligent husbandman. And your harvest-time will soon be over. (*Homilist.*) *The foresight and diligence of the ant:*—The wisdom of providence is eminently conspicuous in the limits it has set to the faculties of the human mind. As experience of the past is of far more importance in the conduct of life than the most accurate and intimate acquaintance with the future, the power of memory is more extensive and efficient than the faculty of foresight. It was wise and merciful to afford us but an indistinct perception of the future. But here man acts in opposition to the will of his Maker. He has withheld from us distinct knowledge of the future, yet how often do we act as if we were familiarly acquainted with it. Our confident expectation of the continuance of life encourages that indolence about their immortal interests in which so many of the children of men waste the season allotted for their preparation for eternity. The admitted history of the ant does more than corroborate and confirm the statement of Solomon in this text. But it is not as a curious fact in natural history, or even as furnishing a theme of praise to the wise and munificent Author of Nature, that the wise man introduces the history and habits of the ant. It is as a rebuke to the sloth and indolence of rational and accountable beings. I. WE ARE ADMONISHED AND REPROVED BY THE SAGACITY AND CARE WITH WHICH THE ANTS MAKE PREPARATION FOR THE WINTER. Nature has given them an instinctive anticipation of the necessities and severity of winter. Grain after grain is borne along, and having been carefully prepared against revegetation, is added to their little store. The winter of our year is fast approaching; are we making all needful preparations? II. WE ARE ADMONISHED BY THE SAGACITY WITH WHICH THE ANT SELECTS AND SEIZES THE PROPER SEASON OF PREPARATION FOR WINTER. The food proper for storage can only be obtained at particular seasons; and if these are neglected, want and wretchedness reign throughout the cells. The present life is the season in which you are called to make provision for the days that are to come. III. THE INCESSANT AND UNINTERMITTED ACTIVITY AND DILIGENCE WITH WHICH THE ANT PLIES HER SUMMER TASK PRESENT ANOTHER IMPORTANT LESSON OF WISDOM TO THE RATIONAL AND ACCOUNTABLE FAMILY OF GOD. It is not an occasional exercise in which this curious creature is engaged. Day after day do these industrious tribes issue forth to the work of gathering. And here, again, they teach us wisdom. The great work to which religion calls us is not one that can be taken up and laid aside at pleasure. IV. THE HARMONY, UNION, AND CONCORD WHICH PREVAIL AMONG THE ANTS SUGGEST A LESSON FOR US. The instinct which prompts them to assist each other in their busy labours has been celebrated as one of the most interesting manifestations of Creating Wisdom. How beautifully does it accord with some of the most frequently-

repeated precepts of the gospel! And also with such counsel of the apostle as this, "Bear ye one another's burdens." (*John Johnston.*) *Sluggishness*:—

I. SLUGGISHNESS OR IDLENESS IS A GREAT SIN. 1. It is a sin against nature, for all living things put out that strength God hath given them. 2. It is against God's commandment. It is stealing for a man to live on other men's labours, and do nothing himself. 3. Idleness produces many other sins: such as disobedience to parents, drunkenness, adultery (as in David's case), stealing, lying, and cheating. 4. Idleness brings many miseries upon man: such as diseases, poverty, unmercifulness in others, loss of heaven and pains of hell. If the idler object that he hurts none but himself, we reply, "So much the worse. Remember, thou must give account of thy time; of thy talents; of thy thoughts; of thy idle words; of thy deeds; of neglecting thy family; of doing no good in the commonwealth."

II. LITTLE CREATURES MAY TEACH GREAT MEN MUCH WIT. From the ant they may learn—1. Providence. 2. Labour. 3. Order. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

A secular sermon on foresight:—The busy ant is to be our minister. The great lesson it teaches is foresight, the duty of rightly improving the passing hour, the wisdom of making the best of our opportunities. The faculty of foresight, the power of doing something for the future, is a faculty most divine. Rightly educated and developed, it gives man peculiar elevation, and invests him with commanding influence. He who sees farthest will rule best. Foresight is not to be confounded with distrust. The wise exercise of foresight makes life pleasant—

1. By economising time. The man who has least to do takes most time to do it in. Our greatest men have been the most severe economists of time. 2. By systematising duties. Some persons have no power of systematising. Such men fret themselves to death, and do not perish alone. The men in the Church who do the least are generally the men of leisure. 3. By diminishing difficulties. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. Foresight numbers and weighs contingencies. The person who is destitute of foresight multiplies the difficulties of other people. The ant makes the best of her opportunities. Every life has a summer, and every life a winter. In recommending preparation for life's winter I am not advocating penuriousness. Covetousness is an affront to God. "The liberal soul shall be made fat." (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

A lazy man:—Our text points to the sluggard—the lazy man. "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?" There are many lazy people in the world. They are generally not worth much, not much wanted, nor of much use, except as beacons. They are not often prosperous. "An idle man," says Mr. Spurgeon, "makes himself a target for the devil; and the devil is an uncommonly good shot." An idle man's heart is the devil's nest; his hands the devil's tools; while the devil lays in wait for active, busy men, the idle man is actually waiting for the devil to set him a job. A race of idle men would create a famine. There are men who are absolutely too indolent to seek for salvation, 'tis too much trouble! And there are lazy Christians too; idlers in the Master's vineyard. "A little sleep," &c. 1. Here is a self-indulgent man. This little speech means, "I am comfortable; don't disturb me; let me alone to enjoy myself." This is the wish of many a sinful man. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion," living purely selfish lives; for self-indulgence may, and generally does, mean selfishness. Self-indulgence is easy. 'Tis easier to give the reins to our appetites than to curb them; to slide than to climb; to please ourselves than to deny ourselves. If we would be men of mark for holiness, usefulness, of eminence either in things temporal or spiritual, we must know something of self-denial. Men who "take it easy" rarely make much headway. Look round amongst Christian workers, business men, great philanthropists, successful inventors, men illustrious or famous in any walk of life; read the biographies of men who have been renowned for any good thing—you will find that they were men of self-denial, not self-indulgent. Moses was a self-denying man; "he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt"; and Moses prospered; he became very great; he was appointed leader and commander of the people of Israel. The apostles were self-denying men; hear them: "We have left all, and have followed Thee." "A little sleep," &c. 2. Here is a procrastinating man. He does not mean to sleep always, not even for long—only for a little while. He only wants a "little sleep," and then he will be stirring. Think of hours, days, lives, wasted in little delays; of souls lost by little delays! No man deliberately intends to be always a slave to sin, the devil, his own lusts. Not always—no; but just now it is pleasant, convenient. Courage to take now the decisive step—now! To-morrow may never come. (*G. B. Foster.*) *The ant and its nest*:—The truth

of Solomon's reference to the ant, which has been questioned before now, is fully vindicated. Dr. Macmillan has found the food stored up in the nests of the ants, and he adds this interesting information: "Examining the seeds collected in the nests of the ants on the top of the hill at Nice more particularly with my magnifying glass, I found to my astonishment that each seed had its end carefully bitten off. And the reason of this was perfectly plain. You know each seed contains two parts—the young plant or germ lying in its cradle, as it were, and the supply of food for its nourishment, when it begins to grow, wrapped round it. Now the ants had bitten off the young plant germ, and they left only the part which was full of nourishment. And they did this to prevent the seeds from growing and exhausting all the nourishment contained in them. If they did not do this the seed stored under the ground, when the rains came, would shoot, and so they would lose all their trouble and be left to starve. I could not find in the heap a single seed that had not been treated in this way. Of course, none of the seeds that had their ends bitten off would grow; and you might as well sow grains of sand as the seed found in ants' nests."

The necessity of providing for the spiritual experiences of the future :—I. THE IMPORTANT AND INTERESTING TRUTH WHICH THESE WORDS SUGGEST. That provision ought to be made for the future. 1. We should make provision for the soul. 2. What is the kind of provision needed for the soul? 3. The period against which we are to make this provision. The winter of death and eternity. II. THE SEASON IN WHICH THIS PROVISION IS TO BE MADE. The ants secure their winter requirements during the summer. Our life may be compared to summer for two reasons—1. Because during the summer we have every needful opportunity of getting ready for the winter. 2. Because summer is the only time in which this provision for the winter can be made. III. THE REPROOF WHICH IS HERE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO NEGLECT TO MAKE THE PROVISION. 1. The force of this rebuke arises from the insignificance of the being by whose conduct we are reproved. 2. The disadvantageous circumstances in which they are said to be placed. 3. From that which they make their provision. 4. From the season against which they provide. 5. From the epithet applied to those who are negligent. IV. THE ADVICE WHICH THE WISE MAN GIVES. 1. A lesson of wisdom. 2. A lesson of industry. 3. A lesson of perseverance. If not making this preparation, what will by and by be our moral destitution! (J. Coe.) *Industry* :—The indolent and improvident are here addressed. They are sent to the inferior creation for a lesson; and not to the greatest and noblest of the animals, but to one of the least and most insignificant of the insects. The providence of the ant has, by some naturalists, been questioned. It has been alleged that during winter they are, like some other insects, in a state of torpidity, and therefore need not the precaution ascribed to them in ver. 8. On this we observe—1. If the fact of their laying up provisions be ascertained, all analogy more than warrants the conclusion that it is for some end. 2. It is said the stock laid up is not for winter, but for the sustenance of the young, when they need the almost undivided attention of the whole. But as a proof of providence, this comes to the same thing. 3. The assertion that the laying up of provisions by the ant is a mistake may not apply to the ants of every country. In tropical climates they do lay up provisions. The main lesson the sluggard has to learn from the ant is industry. Three grounds of this duty are indicated in Scripture—1. That persons may not be a burden on society or on the Church. 2. That they may be out of the way of temptation; for there are many temptations in idle habits. 3. That they may have wherewith to assist others, whose needs, from unavoidable causes, may be greater than their own. One perilous characteristic of sloth is, that it is ever growing. (R. Wardlaw.) *The teaching of the ant* :—Man was created with more understanding than the beasts of the earth. But our minds are so debased by our apostasy from God that the meanest creatures may become our teachers. I. THE CHARACTER OF THE PERSON WHOM THE WISE MAN HERE ADDRESSES. The sluggard! Sloth casteth into a deep sleep, and in the verses following the text the sluggard is represented as in this state. He spends his time in fruitless wishes. He is discouraged by the least opposition. He creates imaginary dangers for himself. We know well who they are whose hands refuse to labour, who are clothed with rags, and make poverty not only their complaint, but their argument. But sloth is not confined to the common affairs of life, nor the character of a sluggard to men in any particular station. There is sloth in religion; neglecting the one thing needful, the care of our immortal souls. II. THE COUNSEL OR ADVICE WHICH THE WISE MAN HATH GIVEN US. The ant instructeth us not by speech, but by actions. Therefore we are called

to "consider her ways"; how she is employed, and for what ends she is active. The wisdom we learn from the ant is the wisdom of acting suitably to our superior nature and our glorious hopes. We learn from the ant three things—1. A foresight and sagacity in making provision for the time to come. How dreary must the winter of life be, when the previous seasons have been passed in sloth, in idleness, or in folly! 2. Activity and diligence. The ant never intermits her labours as long as the season lasts. Happy were it for man that he as faithfully employed his precious time to render himself useful in this world, or to prepare for eternity. 3. Sagacity in making use of the proper season for activity. Opportunity is the flower of time; or it is the most precious part of it, which, if once lost, may never return. Foresight, diligence, and sagacity the ant employs by an instinct of nature. She has no guide, but we have many guides. She "hath no overseer," but man acts under the immediate inspection of Him "whose eyes are as a flame of fire." And the voice of conscience in us is the voice of God. The ant "hath no ruler," or judge to call her to account for her conduct; but every one of us must give account of himself to God. III. IMPROVEMENT OF THE SUBJECT. 1. The sluggard sins against the very nature which God hath given him. 2. The sluggard sins against the manifest design of providence. 3. The sluggard sins against the great design of the gospel. Let us then be no longer "slothful in business," but "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." (R. Walker.) *Lessons for children from the ant*:—An ant could tell us strange things. She could tell about the houses they live in, some of which are forty stories high, twenty stories being dug out, one beneath another, under the earth, and twenty stories being built up over them, above ground; she could tell about the different kinds of trades they follow, how some are miners, and dig down into the ground; some are masons, and build very curious houses, with long walls, supported by pillars, and covered over with arched ceilings. She could tell how some are carpenters, who build houses out of wood, having many chambers which communicate with each other by entries and galleries; how some are nurses, and spend their whole time taking care of the young ones; some are labourers, and are made, like the negro slaves, to work for their masters; while some are soldiers, whose only business it is to mount guard, and stand ready to defend their friends and fellow-citizens. The ants teach—I. A LESSON OF INDUSTRY. The ant is a better example of industry than even the bee. II. A LESSON OF PERSEVERANCE. They never get discouraged by any difficulties they may meet with. Perseverance conquers all things. III. A LESSON OF UNION. The benefits of being united, and working together. The union of the ants both preserves them safely and enables them to do great good. IV. A LESSON OF KINDNESS. Ants are a very happy set of creatures. There seems to be nothing like selfishness among them. V. A LESSON OF PRUDENCE, or looking ahead. The power to think about the future, and to prepare for it. (R. Newton, D.D.)

Ver. 7. Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler.—*Overseers needed*:—When I began to employ workmen in this country (Palestine), nothing annoyed me more than the necessity to hire also an overseer, or to fulfil this office myself. But I soon found that this was universal and strictly necessary. Without an overseer very little work would be done, and nothing as it should be. The workmen, every way unlike the ant, will not work at all unless kept to it, and directed in it by an overseer, who is himself a perfect specimen of laziness. He does absolutely nothing but smoke his pipe, order this, scold that one, and discuss the how and the why with the men themselves, or with idle passers by. The ants manage far better. Every one attends to his own business and does it well. (W. Thomson.)

Ver. 9. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?—*The sleeper aroused*:—The various authors of Scripture are accurately acquainted with the human character. Among numerous defective habits and characteristics of our nature, which Solomon points out and condemns, is that of indolence; excessive fondness for ease and personal indulgence. The language of the text may be used in connection with the affairs of religion and of the soul. I. THE STATE WHICH IS DEPRECATED. It is a state of "sleep"—a moral condition of which corporeal sleep furnishes the most apt representation. 1. Notice its moral characteristics. The state of sleep is a state of forgetfulness, a state of ignorance, and a state of insensibility. What man is to the material world in a state of corporeal sleep, that he is to the spiritual world when he is influenced by his original and his natural passions. The spiritual characteristics of man's condition, illus-

trated by the metaphor of the text, will be found to be borne out by the entire and uniform testimony of the Word of God. That testimony is, from the commencement to the close, a record of human depravity, operating in connection with forgetfulness, with ignorance, and with insensibility, and hence deriving, and hence preserving over the species its empire of corruption and of abominable foulness.

2. Notice its penal evils. Sleep is a state of privation and insecurity. The characteristics we have noticed are not involuntary, they are wilful. They are not unfortunate, they are guilty. They are heinous and flagrant transgressions against the law, and against the authority, of God. And hence it is, they expose the persons indulging them to a dispensation of displeasure and of wrath.

II. THE CHANGE WHICH IS DESIRED. There should be an awaking and "arising out of sleep." 1. In what does this change consist? The spiritual awakening which is desired constitutes a condition precisely the reverse of that which already has been defined. It consists in a state in which man exchanges forgetfulness for remembrances, ignorance for illumination, and insensibility for sensitiveness and tenderness. Spiritual truth is now discerned, contemplated, believed, and felt; and it produces in the mind all the affections, and in the life all the habits, for which it was designed: repentance, prayerfulness, love to God, zeal for God, obedience to God, diligence in working out the salvation of the soul, and intense and constant aspirings after a state of salvation in the glory of another world. The penal evils, which formerly dwelt over the horizon of the spirit as with the darkness of midnight, are dispelled, and are made to disappear.

2. How is this change produced? There is one Agent, by whose power it must exclusively and efficaciously be performed—the agency of the Holy Spirit of God. The Divine Spirit is the one efficacious source of all that is holy and redeeming in the character and circumstances of man. But there are certain means, appointed by the authority of God, to be addressed by those who have been changed to those who have not, and in connection with them it is that the Spirit produces the desired and happy result. Illustration of the use of means is found in the parable of the valley of dry bones. The system of means exists with remarkable plenitude and sufficiency in the dispensation of the gospel.

III. THE APPEAL WHICH IS ENFORCED. The challenge implies that there ought to be no procrastination or delay in the change which is desired and pleaded for. Pleading with sinners, I would say—1. Consider the protracted period of time during which you have indulged in slumber already. 2. Consider the increased difficulty of awakening the longer the slumber is indulged. 3. Consider the rapidly approaching termination of life, and arrival of judgment and eternity. (*James Parsons.*)

Too much sleep:—As waking idleness was condemned before, so sleepy idleness is condemned here. Sloth begets sleep. I. GOD WILL CALL MEN TO A RECKONING FOR THEIR TIME. 1. God gives us time as a talent in trust. 2. God looks for some good from men in their time. II. TOO MUCH SLEEP IS AS BAD AS WAKING IDLENESS. 1. Overmuch sleep is the fruit of idleness. Men that have much to do have little mind or time for sleep. 2. As little good is done in sleep as in waking idleness. Moderate your sleep. Too much sleep makes a man heavy and dull-witted. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

The danger of delaying repentance:—We have the sluggard's picture drawn in reference to his eternal concerns. He is one that puts off his great work from time to time. Here is something supposed. The sleeper convinced that he has slept and neglected his work. The sleeper convinced that he must awake and set to his work. The sleeper resolved to awake and mind his business. Something expressed. A delay craved. The quantity of this delay: it is but a little in the sluggard's conceit. The mighty concern he is in for this delay. We have the fatal issue of the course. **Delays are dangerous.** Consider what ruin comes upon him; how this ruin comes upon him—swiftly, silently and surprisingly, irresistibly. This is all owing to the cursed love of ease. The delay and putting off repentance or salvation-work is a soul-ruining course among gospel-hearers.

I. WHY IS IT THAT GOSPEL-HEARERS DELAY AND PUT OFF REPENTANCE? 1. Satan has a great hand in this. He is always urging either that it is too soon or else that it is too long adorning. 2. The cares and business of the world contribute much to this. The predominant love of carnal ease. 4. The predominant love of sin. 5. A natural aversion and backwardness to holiness. When light is let into the mind, but the aversion still remains in the will, what can be expected but that the business of repentance, which they dare not absolutely refuse, will be delayed? 6. The hope of finding the work easier afterwards. 7. A large reckoning on the head of time that is to come. 8. A fond conceit of the easiness of salvation-work. 9. A conceit of sufficient ability in ourselves to turn ourselves from sin unto God.

II. THIS DELAYING IS A SOUL-RUINING COURSE. 1. It is directly opposite to the gospel call, which is for to-day, not for to-morrow. All the calls of the gospel require present compliance. 2. It is threatened with ruin. And this threatening has been accomplished in many whom their slothful days have caused to perish. 3. Whenever grace touches the heart men see that it is so. 4. It has a native tendency to soul-ruin. The state of sin is a state of wrath, where ruin must needs compass a man about on every hand. The longer men continue in sin, spiritual death advanceth the more upon them. While they remain in this state there is but a step betwixt them and death, which you may be carried over by a delay of ever so short a time. Use 1. For information: That delayers of repentance are self-destroyers, self-murderers. By delays the interest of hell is advanced. Satan is most busy to ply the engine of delays. They are sinners' best friends that give them least rest in a sinful course. Use 2. Of lamentation: Thou knowest not the worth of a precious soul, which thou art throwing away for what will not profit. Thou knowest not the excellency of the precious Christ. Thou knowest not the worth of precious time. Thou knowest not the weight of the wrath of God. Thou dost not observe what speed thy ruin is making while thou liest at ease. Thou dost not observe how near thy destruction may be. Thou dost not observe how utterly unable thou art to ward off the blow when it comes. Use 3. Of reproof to delayers of salvation-work: To delaying saints. A delay of righting their case when matters are wrong, by receiving their repentance and the actings of faith. The delaying to give up some bosom-idol that mars their communion with God. The delaying to clear their state before the Lord. The delaying of some particular duty, or piece of generation-work, which they are convinced God calls them to. The delaying of actual preparation for eternity. To delaying sinners: Is the debt of sin so small upon thy head that thou must run thyself deeper in the debt of God's justice? Is not the holy law binding on thee? Who has assured thee that ever thou shalt see the age thou speakest of? Who has the best right to thy youth and strength? Ye middle-age people, why do ye delay repentance? I exhort you all to delay repentance and salvation-work no longer. (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.—A bad man:—I. THE PORTRAIT OF A BAD MAN. 1. He is perverse in speech. He has no regard for truth or propriety. False, irreverent, impure, audacious. 2. He is artful in his conduct. "Winketh with his eyes," &c. He expresses his base spirit in crafty and clandestine and cunning methods. He is anything but straightforward and transparent. 3. Mischievous in purpose. "Deviseth mischief." Malevolence is his inspiration. He rejoiceth in evil. **II. THE DOOM OF A BAD MAN.** "Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly." This doom is—1. Certain. The moral laws of the universe and the Word of God guarantee the punishment of sin. 2. Sudden. "Suddenly shall he be broken." The suddenness does not arise from want of warning, but from the neglect of warning. 3. Irremediable. "Without remedy." When once his doom is fixed, there is no alteration. "As the tree falls, so it must lie." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) **False liberty:**—In human nature, as in every other, there is an innate love of freedom. But alas! in human nature, as fallen, this principle, good in itself, has taken a sadly perverse direction. It is too often the mere love of following, without restraint, our own inclinations. And while aversion to restraint is common to all, it is peculiarly strong in the bosom of youth. The freedom, not the want of it, is sometimes the thing really to be ashamed of. (*R. Wardlaw.*) **Naughtiness.—"A man of Belial."** Perhaps an unthrifty man; certainly a lawless man. **A man of naughtiness.** A child of the devil. **I. A NOTORIOUSLY WICKED MAN CARES FOR NO LAWS OF GOD OR MAN.** 1. He hath stopped the mouth of his conscience with his sins. 2. He has no love to either God or man, therefore he disregards both. 3. He fears neither, and therefore slights their laws. 4. He sees many escape, and such examples harden their hearts. **II. SUCH A MAN'S LIFE IS ALTOGETHER WICKED.** 1. His thoughts are altogether earthly. 2. All his delight is in wickedness. **III. A PERVERSE MOUTH IS A SURE MARK OF AN UNGODLY MAN.** 1. Few, or only the extremely wicked, will talk or boast of their wickedness. 2. When men are grown to this height they are beyond the "Cape of Good Hope." A crooked mind will make a crooked mouth. Take heed. God hath given thee a mouth to speak to His glory, not to dishonour Him, nor to proclaim thine own shame. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 13. He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.—*Secret ways of speaking*:—The wicked man not only abuseth his mouth, but also his eyes, feet, and fingers. When he is ashamed, or wants power to utter his mind as he would in words, he makes it known by signs; showing forth his spleen, lust, or contempt by his eyes, feet, or fingers. He is much addicted to perverse speeches who, when his tongue fails, speaks with his other members. He cannot hold; he must make his mind known to his brethren in evil some way or other. He makes known occasions of evil to his companions by signs. He acts his part to draw others to folly. What he cannot or dare not persuade to by words, that he doth by gestures. His tongue is not sufficient to express his wickedness. He useth gestures instead of words. He omits no way to stir up others to wickedness. He useth three quick members, that are easily moved, to show his quick, wicked wit by them. He abuses all the members of his body, but especially eyes, feet, and hands, to be signs of lewdness. He is wholly composed of fraud, and while he counterfeits goodness in words, practices mischief by signs. The froward person cannot always speak well, and therefore must sometimes hold his peace, and show his mind by tokens, lest his wicked disposition be discovered. **I. A WICKED MAN MAKES HIS MIND KNOWN BY HIS EYES.** So Eliphaz conceived of Job (Job xv. 12. See also Psa. xxxv. 19). 1. In general. There is a faculty in all the members, some way or other to express the thoughts of the heart, though not so clear as in the tongue. Men use these faculties when they are ashamed to speak what they would have, or would be understood only by their partners in evil, to whom they give particular known tokens. 2. In particular. Men by the eyes give signs of wantonness. Men wink for flattery, as conniving at, or tacitly commending what others say or do. Or for derision, as intimating secretly to a friend that another man's words or actions are ridiculous. Or for secret solicitation to another, to do some evil, as to strike or wound a man. **II. A WICKED MAN'S FEET CAN SPEAK.** They speak—1. Rage and anger, as when men stamp with their feet. 2. Murder, when they go apace to take occasion to kill. 3. Wantonness. So the treading on the toe is commonly interpreted by wantons. **III. A WICKED MAN'S FINGERS TEACH FOLLY.** 1. Anger. Men hold out the finger by way of threatening. 2. Derision. We can mock with our fingers. 3. Mischief. By lifting up the finger giving a sign to hurt others. (*Ibid.*) *How character is expressed*:—Naughty people think that no one knows anything about their naughtiness, when the truth is, that everybody knows it. The inward character of the man is expressed through mouth, eyes, hands, and feet. **I. EYES.** "He winketh with his eyes." How much of the character the eye expresses! There is the open, clear, intelligent look that speaks volumes. There is the low, cunning look, the guilty, stealthy look of the criminal—well known and easily detected by experts. The eye speaks all the motions of the mind. It can command, entreat, repel, invite, subdue. Emerson says, "The eye obeys exactly the action of the mind." **II. FEET EXPRESS THE CHARACTER.** Compare the firm step of the business man and the shuffling wriggle of the loafer. How much of bad character is expressed in the word "tramp"! The Bible often designates the whole character of a man by the word "walk." **III. HANDS HAVE A LANGUAGE.** The wave of the hand, the use of the hands in public address, the sign or signal between two persons. The dumb talk together with their hands. Learn—1. If you would be received as a worthy person, you must be worthy at heart. 2. If you would be known as upright, you must be such at heart. 3. If you aspire to rank in the community as a lady or gentleman, you must be such in every fibre of your being. Character always carries its own certificate with it. (*George H. Smyth.*)

Vers. 16-19. These six things doth the Lord hate.—*The seven abominable things*:—A catalogue of evils specially odious to the Infinite One. **I. HAUGHTY BEARING.** "A proud look." Pride is frequently represented in the Bible as an offence to the Holy God. Haughtiness is an abomination, because it implies—1. Self-ignorance. 2. Unkindness. 3. Irreverence. **II. VERBAL FALSEHOOD.** "A lying tongue." 1. Falsehood always implies a wrong heart. A pure heart supplies no motive for falsehood. Vanity, avarice, ambition, cowardice are the parents and patrons of lies. 2. Falsehood always has a bad social tendency. It disappoints expectations, shakes confidence, loosens the very foundations of social order. **III. HEARTLESS CRUELTY.** "Hands that shed innocent blood." Cruelty implies—1. An utter lack of sympathy with God's creatures. 2. An utter lack of sympathy with God's mind. He who inflicts pain is out of sympathy both with

the universe and with his Maker. IV. VICIOUS SCHEMING. "A heart that deviseth wicked imaginations." There are some hearts so bad that they are ever inventing some evil thing. Illustrate by antediluvian man. V. MISCHIEVOUS EAGERNESS. "Feet swift in running to mischief." They not only do mischief, but they do it eagerly, with ready vigilance; they have a greed for it. VI. SOCIAL SLANDER. The slanderer is amongst the greatest of social curses. He robs his fellow-creature of his greatest treasure—his own reputation, and the loving confidence of his friends. VII. DISTURBING STRIFE. "And he that soweth discord among brethren." He who by tale-bearing, ill-natured stories, and wicked inventions produces the disruptions of friendship, is abhorrent to that God who desires His creatures to live in love and unity. This subject serves to show three things—1. The moral hideousness of the world. These seven evils everywhere abound. 2. The immaculate purity of God. He hates these things. Therefore they are foreign to himself. 3. The true mission of the godly—to endeavour to rid the world of the evils offensive to Heaven. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 20. My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother.—*Words of counsel to schoolboys*.—While your recollections of home are fresh I am anxious to direct your thoughts to one or two matters to which those recollections may possibly give a weight and a force which they might not otherwise possess. I. CHERISH HOME TIES AS AMONG YOUR MOST SACRED POSSESSIONS. One of the dangers of public school-life is learning to disparage feelings of affection for the home. It is not manly to scorn those boys who are at times "home-sick." The truest manliness is not, and cannot be, divorced from tenderness; and while I would enforce with all my heart the necessity for courage in facing the first trouble of a schoolboy's life, I would remind all who listen to me that the boy who retains most strongly his affection for his home will grow up a truer man and a truer gentleman than the youth who casts those affections on one side as something to be ashamed of. II. DO NOT SUPPOSE THAT SCHOOL LIFE IS IN ANY WAY INTENDED TO SUPERSEDE YOUR HOME LIFE. Most of you have come from homes in which you have been the objects of Christian thoughtfulness, and the subjects of religious training. The higher branches of what is called "secular knowledge" are but branches of the teaching that was begun at home. Secular is not opposed to sacred. Is not all learning sacred? "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"; and there is no true knowledge which may not be said to have its spring there. In the text Solomon means by the "father's commandment" those principles of godliness and virtue which are inculcated in every Christian home. Not one of you has come here to begin, and not one of you will here complete, his education. When God sends us into the world it is that we may be educated for Him—trained for Him. That training—with all its defects and failings—begins in the home, and, wherever we may afterwards go, and under whatever circumstances we may afterwards be placed, our after-life is only a continuation of what our home life has been. When you leave school, carry your home life—those affections and feelings which have been awakened in you in the midst of those whom you love—carry these into your after-life, for without them life will be incomplete. III. NEVER BE ASHAMED OF YOUR RELIGION. John Angell James attributed his position as a Christian man to the courage of a fellow-apprentice, who kneeled by his bedside to pray, when James was neglecting to do so through feelings of shame. That apprentice dared to do right. He was not ashamed to have it known that he prayed to God. It was said of an old naval officer, two or three hundred years ago, that as he feared God, he knew no other fear. IV. GIVE YOUR HEARTS WHOLLY TO THE GOD OF YOUR FATHERS. Youth is the fittest time for religion, as it is the best time for learning anything. While your hearts are still fresh, and still susceptible of good impressions, yield them up to the Saviour. (F. Wagstaff.)

Ver. 22. When thou goest, it shall lead thee.—*The comfort of the thought of God's guidance in after-life of those brought up in His fear and love*.—Who is there who has never felt in his heart a wish for some one to advise, direct, and help him? There is an Adviser, a Helper, promised to us, able, powerful to guide and help us with unerring wisdom through any difficulties or troubles—the gracious Father, the redeeming Son, the Spirit that maketh holy. All of us need, daily need, such a Companion, such a Comforter. Those who will meet together and receive God's blessing from the hand of the bishop in confirmation, where will

they all be in a few years, nay, perhaps when another year has passed over their heads? Wherever they may be, this one thing awaits them, temptation—temptation as different as their own circumstances and dispositions, but still temptation. The old fables and monkish legends represent Satan coming in different shapes to one another according to their particular weakness—to one as a gold-finder showing his hidden treasure, to another as a handsome winning man, offering a life of pleasure, to another as a beautiful woman enticing to ways of sin. But all these mean the same thing—that the world, the flesh, and the devil shape their temptations so as best to catch each unprotected soul. There is no saying what that temptation will be like; for to each it may be different according to where he is, and what he is. Some may be tempted by getting on in the world, some by not getting on, some by idle follies, some by busy follies. Let their life be what it may, we can comfort ourselves with the thought that they are prepared, that they have had the best kind of preparation, that which cometh from God only, the knowledge of His mercies and promises, the help of His Holy Spirit. Shall we try to look a little more closely down the long avenue of time, and see them as they will be; some we can fancy taking root here, spreading out their branches safely under the shelter of Christ's Church; some may be found settling far away, some not settling at all, but drifting hither and thither on the changeable tides of life; but what of their souls, which will be bettering or worsening from day to day? We have trained them to know, to fear, and to love the Lord their Saviour, their Comforter, their God; and that God has promised His all-powerful Spirit shall garrison their souls, and strengthen them to fight the life-long fight of faith, if they will not slacken or desert His service. So we will cheer ourselves with the thought that as, like Joseph, they have been bred up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, so they will be able to render as good an account of themselves. (*Archdeacon Milmay.*) **When thou awakest, it shall talk with thee.**—*Man's counsellor*:—I. THE SUBJECT OF THIS STATEMENT—WHAT IT IS THAT WILL DO THIS. The commandment and law of religious and well-instructed persons come to be equivalent to the law of God. "It" really stands for God's book. "Talk" is expressive of that familiarity and friendship which may come to be established between the mind and heart of a young man and the wisdom of God personified and embodied in the book. There is a sacred familiarity, an affectionate friendship, an intercourse of tenderness. Two or three things characterise this sacred converse and intercourse. 1. It will talk with you on the most important subjects. 2. It will talk with you in all sorts of ways. 3. It will talk with authority. There is nothing harsh, nothing grating in its tone of authority if the heart be right. But it will talk with honest plainness. This friend will speak to you with openness and honesty, and with the plainness of reproof. Two or three things you must carry with you in order that this converse may be fully beneficial. 1. You must be on terms of sincerity with the Bible. You must not come reluctantly, nor with doubt, nor to ridicule; you must not come in an improper spirit of questioning. This book treats a man just as one man treats another. To the "froward it will show itself froward." 2. There must be serious and earnest prayer for God's enlightening and guiding Spirit. 3. There must be frequent and sometimes prolonged and deep meditation on the words spoken. There are three ways in which may be illustrated the time that is here indicated—"When thou awakest." 1. Take the expression literally. When you come back in the morning to consciousness. 2. Take the expression figuratively. At particular times, through the force of inward thoughts or of outward circumstances, a young man may suddenly wake up to his peril, foolishness, sin—to duty, the greatness of life, the past, the future. 3. Youth figuratively is emphatically a time of awakening to the realities of life. The young man wakes up to his personal individuality, to a sense of his obligations, feeling that there are now many things which depend on his own judgment—upon himself. II. THE OBJECT OF DISCOURSE IN THE CHAPTER. To warn the young man against things which may injure and ruin in a worldly point of view. And there is a far greater connection between the ruin of a man in a worldly respect and the ruin of the soul than people are apt to imagine. Three causes of ruin—1. Want of caution. Illustrated in giving your name in a bond or guarantee for another. Speculations, hazardous schemes, efforts to get profit without giving sweat. It is God's law that we shall purchase everything with the sweat of our brow; and all hazardous speculations, all gambling transactions, are, in fact, efforts to evade this law. 2. Indolence. There are some people who seem to be asleep all day long. 3. Profigacity. There is not only the seduction of man by the harlot, but the injury of man by his fellow-man. This

last is a more complicated crime than the first. The man who gives way to any impure form of vice is said to "lack understanding," to "destroy his own soul."

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A MAN WHO IS ON THE ROAD TO RUIN. Along with the evil imaginations of the heart, a false tongue, and the love of sowing discord, there is a loss of manliness, of transparency, of sincerity, and the like. Conclusion: 1. Give a spiritual turn to the teaching of the chapter, and see what spiritual thoughts may be educed from it. 2. Invite young men who accept the Christian faith to devote themselves to God's service in the beginning of life. 3. Being so devoted, see that ye be not led away and seduced from your steadfastness by the world, the flesh, and the devil. Look ahead; always consider consequences. You are living under great moral laws, and you can no more alter those laws, you can no more avoid their working out their results, than you can turn the sun from its course. Beware of doing any one thing, of giving way to any one temptation, from which grievous results may arise. (*Thomas Binney.*) *The talking book*:—It is a very happy circumstance when the commandment of our father and the law of our mother are also the commandment of God and the law of the Lord. Happy are they who have a double force to draw them to the right—the bonds of nature and the cords of grace. God's law should be a guide to us—"When thou goest, it shall lead thee"; a guardian to us—"when thou sleepest"—when thou art defenceless and off thy guard—"it shall keep thee"; and a dear companion to us—"when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee." I. WE PERCEIVE THAT THE WORD IS LIVING. How else could it be said—"It shall talk with thee"? 1. It is living, because it is pure truth. Error is death, truth is life. The tooth of time devours all lies. Truth never dies. 2. It is the utterance of an immutable, self-existing God. So the Word is sure, steadfast, and full of power. It is never out of date. 3. It enshrines the living heart of Christ. The living Christ is in the book; you behold His face on almost every page. 4. The Holy Spirit has a peculiar connection with the Word of God. The work of the Spirit in men's hearts is done by the texts which ministers quote rather than by their explanations of them. Take care, then, how you trifle with a book which is so instinct with life. II. WE PERCEIVE THAT THE WORD IS PERSONAL. "It shall talk with thee." 1. God's Word talks about men, and about modern men; about the paradise of unfallen manhood, the fall, the degeneracy of the race, and the means of its redemption. 2. God's Word speaks to men in all states and conditions before God—to sinners and to the children of God. 3. God's Word is personal to all our states of mind. It goes into all details of our case, let our state be what it may. 4. God's Word is always faithful. You never find the Word of God keeping back that which is profitable for you. This suggests a little healthful self-examination. "How does the Word of God speak to my soul?" III. WE PERCEIVE THAT HOLY SCRIPTURE IS VERY FAMILIAR. "Talk with thee." To talk signifies fellowship, communion, familiarity. Scripture speaks the language of men; it comes down to our simplicity; it is familiar as to all that concerns us; it answers inquiries. IV. WE PERCEIVE THAT THE WORD OF GOD IS RESPONSIVE. "With thee," not "to thee." Talk with a man is not all on one side. To talk with a man means answering talk from him. Scripture is a marvellously conversational book; it talks and it makes men talk. V. WE PERCEIVE THAT SCRIPTURE IS INFLUENTIAL. When the Word of God talks with us, it influences us. All talk influences more or less. This book soothes our sorrows, and encourages us. It has a wonderfully elevating power. It warns and restrains. It sanctifies and moulds the mind into the image of Christ. It confirms and settles us. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 23. *The law is light.*—*The law is light*:—The fitness and beauty of this comparison of the law of God with light are seen immediately. If we consider the nature of law we find that it is like the nature of sunlight. There is nothing so pure and clean as light, and there is nothing so pure and stainless as the Divine law. There is nothing so ubiquitous as light. It is everywhere. How very like this light in the material universe is the law of God in the rational. The one naturally suggests and symbolises the other. The moral law is the ordinance which establishes and governs the moral universe. The command, "Let there be light," founded and sustains the material world; and the command, "Let there be supreme love of God," founds and sustains the rational and responsible world. Both commands are universal and all-pervading. Within the rational and reasonable sphere law is everywhere. But there are different degrees of moral light as there are different degrees of natural light. Our object now is to show the similarity

between the moral law and the material light by looking at its influences and effects in the soul rather than by analysing its intrinsic nature. I. **THE MORAL LAW REVEALS LIKE SUNLIGHT.** It makes the sin which still remains in the Christian a visible thing. Believers are continually urged in the Scriptures to bring their hearts into the light of God's law that they may see the sin that is in them. If we would thoroughly understand our intricate and hidden corruption, we must by prayer and reflection intensify the light of the moral law that it may penetrate more deeply into the deep mass, even as the naturalist must concentrate the light of the sun through the lens if he would thoroughly know the plant or the insect. Every Christian who is at all faithful to himself and to God has experienced these illuminating and revelatory influences of the law. But for the believer the law makes its disclosures in a hopeful and salutary manner. The believer has been delivered from the condemning power of the law. The "curse" of the law Christ, his Surety, has borne for him. II. **THE LAW FOR THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST ATTRACTS LIKE THE LIGHT.** Light in the material world universally attracts. When the sun rises up and bathes the world in light how all nature rises up to meet it! Just so does the moral law attract the world of holy beings. They love the law for its intrinsic excellence, and seek it with the whole heart. Their very natures are pure like the law, and like always attracts like. If there be in any soul even the least degree of real holiness, there is a point of attraction upon which the law of God will seize and draw. There is a continual tendency and drift of a holy soul towards God. This view of the Divine law as an attractive energy is an encouraging one to the believer. It affords good grounds for the perseverance of the saints. III. **THE LAW FOR THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST INVIGORATES LIKE LIGHT.** This point of resemblance is not quite so obvious. We more commonly think of the air as the invigorating element in nature, yet it is true of the light that its presence is necessary in order that the spirits of a man may be lively and in vigorous action. The plant that grows up in the darkness is a pale and weak thing. Similar is the effect of the moral law upon one who is resting upon Christ. For the disciple of Christ the law is no longer a judge, but only an instructor. The terrors of the law have lost their power. The law also invigorates him, because, by virtue of his union with Christ, it has become an inward and actuating principle. His heart has been so changed by grace that he now really loves the law of God. For the believer the law is the strength of holiness. IV. **THE LAW FOR THE BELIEVER IN CHRIST REJOICES LIKE THE LIGHT.** It is related in ancient story that the statue of Memnon, when the first rays of the morning gilded it, began to tremble and thrill and send forth music like a sweet harp. And such is the joy-giving influence of righteous law in the heavenly world, and such is its effect in the individual believer. It follows from this unfolding of the subject that the great act of the Christian is the act of faith, and the great work of the Christian is to cultivate and strengthen his faith. The moral law, like the material light, reveals, attracts, invigorates, and rejoices only because the soul sustains a certain special relation to it. (*G. T. Shedd, D.D.*) *Our lamp and light*:—Here the adjuncts of good precepts given by godly parents are set down, which show the good to be gotten from them. I. **GODLY PARENTS HAVE MANY WAYS TO GUIDE THEIR CHILDREN.** By commands, laws, wise reproofs, examples. II. **DIRECTIONS OF GODLY PARENTS ARE A GREAT HELP TO SHOW US THE RIGHT PATHS OF LIFE.** 1. Godly parents are careful that their directions should agree with God's Word. 2. And they have walked themselves in the ways which they command. III. **WISE REPROOFS ARE VERY PROFITABLE FROM A WISE MAN.** 1. They are useful in the Church and commonwealth and family. 2. Because as instructions keep men from sinful courses, so reproofs bring men out of them and back to good ways again. Then be more careful to give reproofs to your friends. Be patient in bearing reproof, and make a good use of it. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 24. **To keep thee from the evil woman.**—*The sin of uncleanness*:—1. One great kindness God designed men in giving them His law was to preserve them from this sin. 2. The greatest kindness we can do ourselves is to keep at a distance from this sin. Arguments urging this caution are—(1) It is a sin that impoverishes men. (2) It threatens death; it kills men. (3) It brings guilt upon the conscience and debauches it. (4) It ruins the reputation, and entails perpetual infamy. (5) It exposes the adulterer to the rage of the jealous husband. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 27. **Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?**—*The*

danger of playing with enticements to sin :—The law of the acquisition of knowledge is that the mind knows the unknown through the known. It gets at the distant through the near, and at the near through the nearer. It ascends to the Divine through the human, and through the material and the temporal mounts up to the spiritual and eternal. As a consequence, the teaching of the Scriptures in the feature alluded to is more specific and intelligible to such a creature as man than it could be in any other mode. The words of the text directly refer to the sin of adultery. The wise man directs youth to the best defence against every tendency to this evil. That defence he finds in the remembrance of, attention to, and conformity with, the family training he received in the morning of life. Then, in a manner remarkably elegant, he places before him the advantages he would reap by assuming towards the law the attitude prescribed. The law is here personified as a wise counsellor, as a careful guardian, and as an interesting companion. That law will preserve against the particular dangers to which age and circumstances make the young peculiarly liable. It is of prime importance to be kept from the "strange woman." In the text the wise man returns again to the necessity of directly resisting the evil in the occasion of it, in the temptation to it, and that from the consideration of the impossibility of playing with the enticement without falling into the sin. **I. EVERY TEMPTATION PRESENTED TO MAN ADDRESSES ITSELF TO A NATURE THAT IS ALREADY CORRUPT, AND THEREFORE LIABLE TO TAKE TO IT.** It appears from the history of mankind that there is force enough in temptation, by keeping the mind in fellowship with it, to influence even holy creatures so as to make them fall. So it happened with our first parents in Eden. If there was such force in temptation when there was nothing but holiness in the mind, what must be its power to a creature that is already depraved? Wherever you find a man you find a sinner. The bias of our nature is towards sin, the original propensity of our minds is in the direction of evil. Here lies the danger of playing with temptation. There is something in thee that is advantageous to it. The whole moral nature of man is impaired. The moral deterioration of mankind is such as to expose them to various assaults of temptation, and if any one boldly frequents infectious places, dallying with and fondling the disease, it is impossible for him, possessing the nature he does, to escape the contagion. **II. MAN, IN PLAYING WITH THE TEMPTATION, PUTS HIMSELF DIRECTLY IN THE WAY THAT LEADS NATURALLY TO SIN.** Every sin has certain enticements peculiar to itself. The great moral defect of thousands is that they do not recognise the sin in the enticement thereto. Show how, by playing with temptation, a man may develop into a thief, a gambler, or a drunkard. Scripture not only forbids the sin itself, but also all the occasions to it, and the first motions of the heart towards it. Do you desire not to fall into any sin, then shut your ears that you hear not the voice of the temptation; turn your eyes away from looking at it; bind yourself to something strong enough to keep you from falling into its snare. When a man plays with the temptation he is in the middle of the road which leads into the sin. **III. PLAYING WITH THE TEMPTATION TO ANY EVIL SHOWS SOME DEGREE OF BIAS IN THE NATURE TO THAT PARTICULAR EVIL.** It is in the communion of the mind with the temptation that power resides, and if there be in the mind a sufficient amount of virtue—of virtue the direct opposite of the sin to which the temptation prompts—to keep a man on his guard from playing with it, he is perfectly safe from any injury that may be inflicted by it. In truth, when it is so the temptation is to him no longer a temptation. When a man hates the sin with perfect hatred the temptation to it is hateful to him, and he avoids not only the sin itself, but all occasions to it and all things that might lead thereto. There is in each one of us separately some predisposition to some particular sin, just as in some bodily constitutions there is a predisposition to certain fevers. There may be something in a man's organism making him incline beforehand to some special sin, and thus placing him under an obligation to exercise special vigilance against that sin. Natural predispositions these may be called; but there are others, the result of habit only, equally powerful in their influence and equally dangerous if any advantage be given them to show themselves. And sometimes the natural predispositions are strengthened by habit. When a man plays with any temptation it is proof of some bias toward the sin which is the direct object of the temptation. The playing with the temptation is nothing else than the heart reaching out after the sin, the lust conceiving in the mind. **IV. PLAYING WITH TEMPTATION ONLY BRINGS MAN INTO CONTACT WITH SIN ON ITS AGREEABLE SIDE, AND THUS GIVES IT AN ADVANTAGE TO MAKE AN IMPRESSION FAVOURABLE TO ITSELF ON THE MIND.** It must be confessed that sin has its pleasure.

It means the immediate satisfaction of the depraved propensities of the nature. Only the pleasure of sin is in the temptation. There you see the impossibility for any one to dally with it without falling a prey to it. **V. MAN, THROUGH PLAYING WITH TEMPTATION, WEAKENS HIS MORAL RESISTANCE TO THE SIN, AND GRADUALLY GETS SO WEAK THAT HE CANNOT RESIST IT.** When a man entertains evil suggestion his moral force begins to be undermined. One depraved thought invites another. Playing with temptation eats away the moral energy. The conscience at last gets so depraved that it permits unforbidden what it once condemned, and so step by step, almost unwittingly to himself, the man finds himself utterly powerless to resist temptation. And that is not all, but playing with the temptation keeps a man from the only means through which he might acquire strength to overcome the sin. **VI. MAN, BY PLAYING WITH TEMPTATION, AT LAST TEMPTS THE SPIRIT OF GOD TO WITHDRAW HIS PROTECTION FROM HIM, AND TO LEAVE HIM TO HIMSELF AND A PREY TO HIS LUST.** Scriptures teach that the Spirit of the Lord exerts His influence in different ways to keep one from sin. Sometimes He overrules external circumstances. At other times He influences the mind by means of certain reflections, so that the temptation fails in its effect upon him. When a man continues to play with temptation, permitting his heart always to run in the channel of his lust, beginning to give way to his first impulses and desires, he vexes and grieves God's Spirit and gradually offends Him so much that He withdraws from him, withholds His protection and allows the temptation in all its force to assault him at a time when lust is strong and the external opportunity perfectly advantageous. And the result is he falls a prey to the temptation. (*Owen Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 30. If he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry.—*Theft through necessity*.—The deceitful and perverting influence of sin requires careful consideration. While as yet it is only a principle in the mind, and not ripened into an external action, it draws into its service the various powers of imagination, invention, and even reason itself. By these powers the forbidden object is represented as a source of peculiar enjoyment, or it is invested with features of external attraction, or it is exhibited as fitted to gratify curiosity at least, and to extend the sphere of natural knowledge. Even after the principle is matured into action, and its fatal consequences begin to be felt, it employs the same powers to find excuses and apologies for the act. The sources from which apologies are drawn are exceedingly numerous. But this is the striking peculiarity of sin, that it seeks with greatest eagerness to draw them from the character, the providence, or the Word of God. The passage now before us seems to hold out an excuse for stealing, or at least to take off the odiousness and criminality of it. **I. THE ASPECT OF THIS ACT IN THE SIGHT OF MEN.** The text implies that by men it is considered as venial or excusable. But it is the act under special limitations. **1. Limited exclusively to food.** The thing stolen is not classed as property. It is that which is seldom coveted, and never for its own sake except under the influence of hunger. But this can never be drawn into an excuse for stealing in general. The food is supposed to be taken by the thief only when he is hungry. It is not inspired by covetousness, but by hunger. This is a very important limitation. Food may be stolen with as much criminality as any other thing, for it may be turned into money. **2. But the feeling of hunger itself is restricted by the text.** The purpose for which it supposes food to be stolen is to satisfy. The thief must take no more even of it than is necessary to extinguish present hunger. He is not permitted to carry any away either to provide against future necessity, or to procure anything which he may be anxious to possess. **3. Food is supposed to be stolen merely to "satisfy the soul"—that is, to preserve the life.** The thief must be at the point of extreme necessity, at which, if he did not commit the act under consideration, he would actually surrender his life. **II. THE ASPECT OF THIS ACT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD.** The text does not state that God regards this thief with indulgence. The context implies that this individual has incurred the penalty of the law, and must be punished if he be found. Mercy, which sets aside the demands of the law, is only sin, and, if generally acted on, would be attended with the most ruinous consequences. The mercy of man is a very inadequate medium for contemplating the mercy of God. Though the act under consideration may seem perfectly innocent to man, it may appear highly criminal and dangerous in the sight of God. The justice of this estimate may be clearly perceived by attending to this case of necessity in two aspects. **1. If the thief has been involved in this necessitous condition by his own misconduct—by idleness, intemperance, or**

any other immoral habit—he is plainly guilty. The very necessity to which he has been reduced is a sinful necessity, since it has been occasioned by his own misconduct. 2. When he has been involved in it by the providence of God. Even in this view the act under consideration is decidedly sinful. It is a serious misimprovement and abuse of God's providence. We may see that even the most extreme case of necessity will not warrant unbelief and the commission of sin. It is better to surrender even life itself than give way to an immoral and criminal act. A case can never occur in which one precept of the law may be set aside in order to avoid the violation of another. The case in which life is in danger is evidently the most extreme; it plainly comprehends every other. If the law is not to be broken in the superior, it is not to be broken in the inferior case; if it is not to be violated when life is at stake, it is much less to be violated when any inferior benefit is at stake. (*George Hislop.*) *Accused of theft*:—At one of the annual Waterloo banquets the Duke of Wellington after dinner handed round for inspection a very valuable presentation snuff-box set with diamonds. After a time it disappeared, and could nowhere be found. The Duke was much annoyed. The guests (there being no servants in the room at the time) were more so, and they all agreed to turn out their pockets. To this one old officer most vehemently objected, and on their pressing the point left the room, notwithstanding that the Duke begged that nothing more might be said about the matter. Of course suspicion fell on the old officer; nobody seemed to know much about him or where he lived. The next year the Duke at the annual banquet put his hand in the pocket of his coat, which he had not worn since the last dinner, and there was the missing snuff-box! The Duke was dreadfully distressed, found out the old officer, who was living in a wretched garret, and apologised. "But why," said his Grace, "did you not consent to what the other officers proposed, and thus have saved yourself from the terrible suspicion?" "Because, sir, my pockets were full of broken meat, which I had contrived to put there to save my wife and family, who were at that time literally dying of starvation." The Duke, it is said, sobbed like a child; and it need not be added that the old officer and his family suffered no more from want from that day.

Ver. 32. *He that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.—The suicide of the soul*:—Lovely as maiden purity is, and crowned with benedictions though it is by Christ, we have here to learn its excellence and fear its loss, by the sad, stern picture of impurity and shameless sin. In these sad proverbs of purity the wise man pictures to us in fearful personification wisdom's rival standing in the same great thoroughfares of earth and bidding to her shameful pleasures the simple youth who throng the broad and crowded way. This is no fancy picture allegorising the dangers of youth. It is drawn from reality, from every-day life. There is no mistake in the outline, no exaggeration in the colouring. The power of sin lies in its pleasure. They are mistaken who assert that there are no gratifications in the enjoyments of sense. Were there none, they would not be so diligently sought. Sin, which brings death to the soul, is yet sweet to the taste. The more we sin the more perverted becomes our taste, the more clamorous for further indulgence. But these stolen waters of sinful pleasure are not always sweet. Pleasant though they may be at the first, they will yet become bitter indeed. Much of the sinner's peril grows out of his simple ignorance. Sin naturally brings with it temporal and physical suffering. But the pleasures of the sensualist are the preludes to a misery words refuse to paint. The sentence that to the "defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure" is fulfilled to the letter. Even the innocent pleasures of conversation become to the sensualist defiling, for he turns them into the foul channel of his own base thought. The mind and conscience of the impure are defiled. The mental faculties of the depraved and sensual lose at once and for ever the power of discerning and appreciating that which is excellent, lovely, and true. The deep things of God are no subjects for the lover of sensual sin to dwell upon. Sensuality not only prevents us from exercising our mental powers with freedom and profit, but it also wastes and enfeebles those powers themselves. Long since has this enfeebling of the intellectual man been noticed as the result of impurity of life. The sensualist must make his choice between intellect and mental imbecility. "If any man defile the temple of God, which is our body, him will God destroy." This avenging work of destruction is well-nigh accomplished here on earth. Body, spirit, and soul—all is impure. But to the pure all things are pure. Unheeding the solicitations of the wanton, they go straight on their way. And this purity may be ours.

Not indeed gained by our own strength, nor by any strength save that which is found at the foot of the Cross. Why may we not thus purify ourselves? To the life of purity we are called throughout the Book of Proverbs, and the cry of heavenly Wisdom is, "Seek early, for the early seekers shall find." (*Bp. William Stevens Perry.*)

CHAPTER VII.

VER. 1. My son keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.—*Parental precepts* :—"Lay up." Hebrew, "hide." A metaphor from treasure not left open in the house, but locked up in chests unseen, lest it should be lost, or got away. **I. CHILDREN MUST REMEMBER PARENTS' WORDS.** 1. Their words of instruction. 2. Of charge or command. 3. Of commendation, for that is a great encouragement to do well. 4. Of consolation, which revives the spirit of good children in their troubles. 5. Of promise. 6. Of prohibition. 7. Of reprehension. 8. Of commination. The spring of parents' words is love—yea, when they chide. The end and result of all their speeches is their children's good. **II. THE HEART IS THE RECEPTACLE FOR GODLY PRECEPTS.** There they must be laid up. 1. They are very precious in themselves. Common things lie about the house. Choice things are locked up. 2. They are very profitable to us, and such things easily creep into our hearts. 3. The heart is the secretest place to lodge them in. 4. It is the safest place. Good precepts should be as ready in our thoughts as if we had them in our eyes. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 5. That they may keep thee from the strange woman.—*Heavenly wisdom protective* :—**I. KNOWLEDGE IS A SPECIAL MEANS TO KEEP US FROM WANTONNESS.** 1. By way of excellency. Wisdom is far more beautiful than the fairest strumpet in the world. 2. By her good counsel. Wisdom will advise thee for thy good. 3. By sweet and pleasant discourse far more pleasant to a pious heart than all the wanton songs in the world. 4. By arming thee against all objections. Keep in with knowledge, and thou shalt be sure to keep out of harlots' paws. **II. THE FALSE WOMAN IS A STRANGER.** Possibly in the sense of being a foreigner, and not considering herself in the control of our moral laws. 1. A stranger in regard to marriage. Then thou hast no right to her. 2. A stranger in regard to carriage. Thou canst not look for any good respect from her. **III. THE FALSE WOMAN IS A FLATTERER.** 1. The difference between her words and her deeds prove it. She speaks like a friend, and acts like an enemy. 2. The difference between her first and her last words proves it. She will surely turn against thee when thy money is spent. She will sink thee with fair words. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 7. A young man void of understanding.—*A youth void of understanding* :—Solomon was pre-eminently a student of character. His forte lay in the direction of moral philosophy, in the sense of the philosophy of morals. **I. THE SPECIAL PERIL OF GREAT CITIES.** Human nature remains the same in every age. The descriptions of the temptations that assailed the youth of Jerusalem and Tyre answers precisely to what we see in our own day. Therefore the counsels and warnings of the ancient sage are as valuable and fitting as ever. The vastness and multitudinousness of our modern cities provide a secrecy which is congenial to vice. In all great towns solicitations to vice abound as they do not elsewhere. Every passion has a tempter lying in wait for it. Whatever be your temperament or constitution, a snare will be skillfully laid to entrap you. Vice clothes itself here in its most pleasing attire, and not seldom appears even under the garb of virtue. **II. THE EVIL OF LATE HOURS.** The devil, like the beast of prey, stalks forth when the sun goes down. Night is the time for unlawful amusements and mad convivialities and lascivious revelry. Now Jezebel spreads her net, and Delilah shears the locks of Samson. Young men, take it kindly when I bid you beware of late hours. Your health forbids it; your principles forbid it; your moral sense forbids it; your safety forbids it. Purity loves the light. Late hours have proved many a young man's ruin. **III. THE DANGER OF FOOLISH COMPANY.** "Simple" in the Book of Proverbs means silly, frivolous, idle, abandoned. You could almost predict with certainty the future of one who selected such society. The ruin of most young men

is due to bad company. It is commonly the finest natures that are first pounced upon. The good-hearted, amiable fellow, with open countenance and warm heart and generous disposition, is at once seized by the vermin of the pit, and poisoned with every kind of pollution. Take care with whom you associate. There are men who will fawn upon you, and flatter you, and call you good company, and patronise you wonderfully, and take you anywhere you wish to go; and—allow you to pay all expenses. As a rule, a companion of loose character is the most mean and selfish of creatures. “Void of understanding.” Understanding is more than wisdom, more than knowledge; it is both and something besides. It is a mind well-balanced by the grace of God; it is the highest form of common-sense, sanctified by a genuine piety. No man’s understanding can be called thoroughly sound until it has been brought under the power of the truth as it is in Jesus. Your only security against the perils of the city, of the dark night, and of evil company, your only safety amid the lusts that attack the flesh, and the scepticisms that assail the mind, is a living faith in God, a spiritual union with Christ. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*)

A beacon to young men :—Now reason is the glory of man. It is a light within the soul by which he is exalted above the brutes that perish. And yet God often charges men with displaying less judgment than the mere animal creatures (Isa. i. 3).

I. THE EVIDENCES OF THIS STATE. How can we know with certainty the young who are void of understanding? 1. Those who throw off the restraints and counsels of their parents and friends. When counsel and supervision are most needed they are rejected, and who so fit to guide and counsel as the parent? 2. Those who become the companion of the foolish and wicked. No other influence will be so disastrous on our highest interests as that of evil companionship. It will insidiously undermine every good principle. 3. Those who disregard the opinions of the wise and good around them. 4. Those who neglect the institutions of religion. The atmosphere of religious ordinances is that of health and life to every virtue and grace of the soul. By neglecting Divine ordinances and services, the heart and mind run fallow. 5. Those who yield themselves up to sensual gratifications. The text refers to the ensnaring woman. “For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,” &c. How fearful the result! Money, reputation, health, mind, morals, life, and the soul, all sacrificed!

II. ITS EVIL RESULTS. 1. The morally evil condition of the youths themselves. Here are powers perverted—talents prostituted—sin and misery increased. 2. The pernicious influence they exert on others. Every such youth has his young friends and relations, all of whom may be corrupted by his conduct. 3. The eternal misery to which they are hastening. **III. THE ONLY REMEDY.** 1. Immediate and genuine repentance. Prompt consideration. 2. There must be the yielding of the heart to Christ. Christ alone can open the blind eyes, expel the foul spirit, renew the heart. 3. By the regulation of the life by the Word of God. 4. Union to, and fellowship with, God’s people. (*J. Burns, D.D.*)

The ignorance and folly of the man of pleasure :—It is a mortifying truth that that age, which of all others stands most in need of advice, thinks itself the least in want of it. Youth is warm even in its desires, hasty in its conceptions, and confident in its hopes. Talk to it when its passions are high, or when pleasure is glittering around it, it will in all likelihood look upon you as come to torment it before its time, and will none of your reproof. The particular error of youth is its pursuit of licentious pleasures. This writer gives us an interesting picture of a young man, confident in his own wisdom, and relying on his own strength, met by a character whom the world has denominated Pleasure. He paints to us the charms which she displays for his seduction, describes the flattery of her tongue, the crafty wiliness of her allurements, and shows us his simple heart won by her deceptions, and following her guilty call.

I. THE MAN OF PLEASURE BETRAYS AN UTTER WANT OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS OWN BEING. It is among the foremost arguments in support of this kind of life that it is only in conformity with that nature which God has given us. But your nature, as long as it is without the renovation of the Eternal Spirit, cannot possibly be made your guide. In reality full of diseases, the man imagines himself in perfect health. Bound in misery and iron, he dreams that he is happy and at liberty. In following his carnal desires a man is surely “void of understanding.”

II. THE MAN OF PLEASURE SHOWS HIS IGNORANCE AND FOLLY IN HIS WANT OF ACQUAINTANCE WITH HIS DUTIES IN THIS WORLD. The sins of impurity are doubly sinful, inasmuch as they incapacitate the follower of them from those exertions to which he is bound in whatever state of life it hath pleased God to call him. The libertine imagines that his duties are easily reconcilable with his pursuits of pleasure; and in few cases

does he show himself more void of understanding. It is their direct tendency to enervate the spirit; to absorb the native vigour of the mind; to extinguish generous ambition, that incitement to worthy deeds; and to drown all in dissipation, indolence, and trifling. The pagans made the temple of honour lie through the temple of virtue. III. THE LIBERTINE SHOWS HIS WANT OF UNDERSTANDING IN HIS IGNORANCE OR DEFIANCE OF OMNIPOTENCE. Of all the instances of want of wisdom, a disregard of the injunctions of Almighty God is surely the most absurd, as well as the most wicked. And it never can be confined to yourself, but involves often the misery, and always the guilt, of others. The man bent on pleasure seldom considers whom he offends, whom he injures, whose confidence he abuses, whose innocence he betrays, what friendship he violates, or what enmities he creates. Your first vice might arise from the seduction of bad companions, but a continuance of it becomes your own sin. IV. THE LIBERTINE ACTS IN OPPOSITION TO HIS OWN CONVICTION. There is always an inward monitor whispering against him. Rouse, then. Break from the infatuating circle. No longer miscall the things of this world. (*G. Mathew, M.A.*) *The young man void of understanding*:—Understanding or reason is the glory of human nature. It is the "candle of the Lord," to light us on our destiny. Where this is not, you have a traveller on a devious path without light, a vessel on a treacherous sea without rudder or compass. Who is the young man void of understanding? 1. One who pays more attention to his outward appearance than to his inner character. He sacrifices the jewel for the casket. 2. One who seeks happiness without rather than within. But the well of true joy must be found in the heart, or nowhere. 3. One who identifies greatness with circumstances rather than with character. But true greatness is in the soul, and nowhere else. 4. One who is guided more by the dictates of his own nature than by the counsels of experience. He acts from the suggestions of his own immature judgment. He is his own master, and will be taught by no one. 5. One who lives in show and ignores realities. He who lives in these pursuits and pleasures which are in vogue for the hour, and neglects the great realities of the soul and eternity, is "void of understanding." (*Homilist.*) *A simple youth void of understanding*:—The young man Solomon had in mind perhaps thought himself wise, but in the opinion of the sober and virtuous part of mankind, he was one of the most infatuated of men. When may a young man be spoken of as "void of understanding"? 1. When he suffers his mind to remain unacquainted with the great principles of religion. 2. When he follows the dictates of his own corrupt heart. How shall we account for all that wickedness which abounds in the world if there is no bad principle from which it breeds? Take corruption out of the heart, and this world would become a paradise. Simple souls, instead of checking the evil principle within them, rather give it the greatest indulgence. 3. When he throws himself in the way of temptation. Snares abound. There is hardly a step in our way in which we do not run some hazard of stumbling. Have we not often complied when we ought to have resisted? Sin is sometimes so artfully disguised that it loses its deformity, and we are insensibly drawn into the commission of it. Is it not, then, wise and prudent to keep at a distance and not to tamper with temptation? The old serpent is too cunning and subtle for us, and if we throw ourselves in his way we must fall. 4. When he has not resolution to withstand the allurements with which he may be surrounded. We can hardly hope to escape allurements altogether. All depends on our yielding to or resisting first enticements. And what avails the most enlightened understanding if we have not firmness to follow its dictates? 5. When he does not hearken to the admonitions of those who are older and more experienced than himself. Vanity and self-conceit are too natural to young minds, and numbers have been led away by them. Positive and headstrong, they refuse to be admonished, and scorn to be controlled. Hence they run headlong into vice, and involve themselves in misery. 6. When he flatters himself with seeing long life and many years. This is very natural to youth. But there is nothing more vain and uncertain. Can there be a greater defect of understanding than to flatter one's self with what we may never enjoy? (*D. Johnston, D.D.*) *A young man void of understanding*:—1. One who makes light of parental restraints and counsels. No young man is walking in safe paths who is engaged in pursuits or pleasures which a wise father or a tender mother would be mortified and grieved to see him mixed up with. 2. One who neglects the cultivation of his mind. If knowledge is power, ignorance is weakness. The mind must be carefully trained in order that the soul may fulfil her destiny upon earth, and be prepared for a more glorious existence hereafter. 3. One who is content to

live an idle and aimless life. To spend the golden hours of existence in irresolution and idleness, with no definite purpose, betrays, as much as anything could do, the lack of good sense. 4. One who chooses his bosom companions from the ranks of the thoughtless and the profane. We are naturally social beings, and seek for pleasure in the company of others. 5. One who yields to the enticements of folly and wickedness. As soon as he reaches the point when he is indifferent to the opinion of the wise and the good, his case may well be set down as desperate. The young are always surrounded by temptations, and every evil thought which is allowed a resting-place in the mind vitiates and corrodes the fibres of the soul, and every sinful deed unnerves the arm and paralyses the essential power of manhood. 6. One who makes light of religion. Religion never encouraged anybody to be indolent and improvident; never led him into the haunts of vice; never wasted his substance in riotous living; never dragged a single victim to the prison or the gallows. All its offices in the world have been elevating and beneficent. Unbelief is not a misfortune, but it is the sin, the damning sin, of the world. Men first do wrong and then believe wrong in order to escape from its consequences. True religion will make you abhor sin, and draw you to Christ, the Redeemer; it will strengthen you for duty, and nerve you for endurance. It will give songs in the night, and through the grave and gate of death it will brighten your pathway to eternal glory. (*John N. Norton.*)

Ver. 8. He went the way to her house.—*Occasions of sin*:—I. MANY OCCASIONS OF SIN PRESENT THEMSELVES UNLOOKED FOR. 1. All places afford temptations. 2. All times have theirs. 3. All things afford it. 4. So do all conditions, all actions, and all persons. Therefore we need to keep a constant watch, since we are not secure in any place, time, or condition. Then suspect all things with a holy suspicion. II. IT IS DANGEROUS COMING NEAR BAD HOUSES. 1. Much danger may come from within. 2. Much danger from without; for ruffians and quarrellers haunt such places. 3. Judgment may be feared from heaven. III. IDLENESS IS THE NURSE OF WANTONNESS. 1. Because nature is corrupt, and of all sins most inclines to wantonness. 2. The soul is very active both in our waking and sleeping, and if it move us not to good it will move us to bad actions. 3. Because labour removes the rubs in the way of wantonness. Spiritual duties and labour in our vocation take the heart, eyes, and ears off from wanton objects. The heart set at liberty by idleness falls upon them with greediness. 4. God's judgment follows idleness to give such over to wantonness. Take heed of idleness. Many think it either no sin or a light one. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 16. I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry.—*A luxuriant bed*:—"I have exhausted the toil of myself and bought the toil of others to increase the luxury of my rest. Come and see the courtly elegance with which my bed is decked. Long and weary days have I laboured at the counting-house, at the workshop, or at the desk. And now my bed is decked. Come and look. Place yourself at my chamber window and tell me what you see now and what you will see next year." 1. "I see thee lying on this bed which thou hast decked, fretful, restless, and miserable. Thou hast found out too late that enjoyment is more painful than expectation. 2. I see thee dying on the same bed. May God grant thee mercy! but if He does it is in spite of the luxury with which thou art surrounded. 3. I see thee lying in another bed. It is narrow, and though well quilted and smoothed, yet it has no room for the weary body to turn, or for the feverish head to lift itself." "I have decked my bed with peace. And though its coverings are but scanty, and though sorrow and desolation have taken their seats by its side, yet peace remains. And there is one like unto the Son of Man whose gracious face ever shines on me from before this, my poor resting-place, so that though deserted and wretched, His love gives me a comfort this world can neither give nor take away. Come and see." "I have come, oh, saint of God! and I see three sights. 1. Destitution and pain are indeed about thee as thou liest on that rude couch; but peace and love reign there, and who shall prevail against the Lord's elect? 2. I see thee in thy dying hour. Deserted and miserable thou mayest be, but angelic forms are hovering over thee, and I hear a voice speaking as man can never speak, saying, 'Come, thou beloved of My Father!'" 3. I see thee in thy narrow bed, but I see something else behind. For I see that great city, the holy Jerusalem, having the glory of God. And I hear a voice there saying, 'Who is this who is arrayed in white robes? and whence came he?' And I say unto him,

'Sir, thou knowest.' And the voice says, 'He is one of them that came out of great tribulation,'" &c. (*Christian Treasury*.)

Ver. 21. With her much fair speech she caused him to yield.—*Good and bad speech* :—There is a force in words which it is often almost impossible to resist. Good words have a wonderful virtue in them to work upon the mind, and a great part of the good which we are called to do in the world is to be accomplished by means of that little member, the tongue. But corrupt minds are often found to have greater intelligence in persuading men to sin because human nature is depraved, and needs only a temptation to draw men to the practice of the worst of evils. No words have greater force in them to persuade men to sin than the flatteries of the strange woman, and therefore the apostle Paul, who directs us to strive against sin, calls loudly to us to flee youthful lusts. Such lusts can scarcely be conquered but by flight, because the temptations to them, when they meet with a simple mind and an impure heart, are like sparks of fire lighting upon stubble fully dry. The force that is in the tongue of the strange woman will not excuse the deluded youth; for his yielding to her is to be attributed to the depravity of his own heart, which inclines him to prefer the advice of a bad woman to the counsels of the Supreme and Eternal Wisdom. (*G. Lawson*.)

Ver. 22. As a fool to the correction of the stocks.—*Slaughter of young men* :—1. We are apt to blame young men for being destroyed, when we ought to blame the influences that destroy them. Society slaughters a great many young men by the behest, "You must keep up appearances." Our young men are growing up in a depraved state of commercial ethics, and I want to warn them against being slaughtered on the sharp edges of debt. For the sake of your own happiness, for the sake of your good morals, for the sake of your immortal soul, and for God's sake, young man, as far as possible keep out of debt. 2. Many young men are slaughtered through irreligion. Take away a young man's religion, and you make him the prey of evil. If you want to destroy a young man's morals take his Bible away. You can do it by caricaturing his reverence for Scripture. Young man, take care of yourself. There is no class of persons that so stirs my sympathies as young men in great cities. Not quite enough salary to live on, and all the temptations that come from that deficit. Unless Almighty God help them they will all go under. Sin pays well neither in this life nor in the next, but right thinking, right believing, and right acting will take you in safety through this life and in transport through the next. (*T. De Witt Talmage*.)

Ver. 23. Till a dart strike through his liver.—*The gospel of health* :—Solomon had noticed, either in vivisection or in post-mortem, what awful attacks sin and dissipation make upon the liver, until the fiat of Almighty God bids the soul and body separate. A javelin of retribution, not glancing off or making a slight wound, but piercing it from side to side "till a dart strike through his liver." Galen and Hippocrates ascribe to the liver the most of the world's moral depression, and the word melancholy means black bile. Let Christian people avoid the mistake that they are all wrong with God because they suffer from depression of spirits. Oftentimes the trouble is wholly due to physical conditions. The difference in physical conditions makes things look so differently. Another practical use of this subject is for the young. The theory is abroad that they must first sow their wild oats and then Michigan wheat. Let me break the delusion. Wild oats are generally sown in the liver, and they can never be pulled up. In after-life, after years of dissipation, you may have your heart changed, but religion does not change the liver. God forgives, but outraged physical law never. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 24. Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children.—*On impurity* :—Cicero says, "There is not a more pernicious evil to man than the lust of sensual pleasure; the fertile source of every detestable crime, and the peculiar enemy of the Divine and immortal soul." This is true of all sensual pleasures immoderately pursued and gratified beyond the demands of reason and of nature. I. HOW CONTRADICTORY THE VICE OF IMPURITY IS TO THE GREAT LAWS OF NATURE AND OF REASON, OF SOCIETY AND RELIGION. 1. It is in opposition to the first law of our nature, which enjoins the due subordination and subjection of our inferior appetites and passions to the superior and ruling principle of the soul—that principle which

distinguishes man from the animal creation. What can be so degrading to our nature as to reverse this first and important law by giving the reins of dominion to an inferior and merely animal appetite, implanted in us, as a slave, to serve the purposes of our temporal existence? Appetites are wholly of sense; with them, abstractly considered, the mind has no concern. But if indulged beyond due bounds, they darken the mind and absorb all its noblest faculties. 2. It opposes the laws of reason, whose peculiar office it is to direct our conduct and form our manners in such a way as becomes the rank and station we bear in the universe. What folly, then, to indulge a vice and pursue a conduct which is at once most opposite to, and most derogatory from, the honour and the dictates of reason! And can anything be more so than the unrestrained gratification of impure desires, with which reason is so far from concurring, that men are obliged to lull its keen remonstrances in the tumult of passion and the hurry of sensual pursuits? 3. It opposes the laws of society—those universal laws of justice, honour, and virtue, upon which all society is founded, and upon the due observation whereof the happiness and the permanence of society depends. Nothing conduces more to corrupt the morals and deprave the minds of youth than the unrestrained gratification of impure and lustful desires; nothing conduces more to spread a general corruption of manners; nothing more affects and harms the nearest and dearest interests of men; nothing introduces more distressful injuries; and nothing is a greater prejudice or discouragement to just and honourable marriage. 4. It opposes the Divine laws. The Divine instructions inform man of the true state of his nature, of his dignity, fall, and possible restoration. Man is informed that his triumph is sure and his reward inestimable if, superior to sense and to appetite, he improves the Godlike principle of reason and virtue in him and purifies himself, even as his God, his great pattern and exemplar, is pure. There are some considerations peculiar to the Christian religion, drawn from the “Inhabitation of God’s Holy Spirit in the bodies of believers as His temples,” and from their being incorporated by faith as living members into the pure and immaculate body of Jesus Christ. Can men be so senseless as to defile this holy temple? What can the gratification of youthful lusts bestow, adequate to the loss, to the misery which it will assuredly occasion? Neither the laws of God nor of man are founded in fancy or caprice. No precept is imposed with a view to command or prohibit aught that was unessential to their well-being. II. HOW INIMICAL THE VICE OF IMPURITY IS TO THE BEST INTERESTS OF OURSELVES AND OF OUR NEIGHBOURS! What ever youth would wish to arrive at true honour and true happiness must scorn with a noble fortitude the allurements of the harlot pleasure, and implicitly follow the counsels of pure virtue. The practice of impurity never can, never did or will, produce aught but thorns and briars, “mischiefs” and “miserics,” to others and to ourselves. One peculiar and aggravating circumstance of malignity in this vice is that the perpetration of it involves the ruin of two souls. You cannot be singly guilty. Have pity on yourselves! Have pity on the companions of your sin! The seductions of innocence can never be adequate to the end proposed. It is a complicated guilt. All gratifying of lustful passions must be in a high degree injurious to their fellow-creatures, and particularly to the unhappy partners of their guilt. And the vice of impurity is peculiarly noxious and prejudicial to ourselves, to the mind, body, estate, and reputation. (*W. Dodd, LL.D.*)

Ver. 27. *Her house is the way to hell.—The way to hell:*—An energetic expression. It is not the place itself, but the way to it. In this case what is the difference between the way and the destination? The one is as the other, so much so that he who has entered the way may reckon upon it as a fatal certainty that he will accomplish the journey and be plunged into “the chamber of death.” No man means to go the whole length. A man’s will is not destroyed in an instant; it is taken from him, as it were, little by little, and almost imperceptibly; he imagines that he is as strong as ever, and says that he will go out and shake himself as at other times, not knowing that the spirit of might has gone from him. Is there any object on earth more pathetic than that of a man who has lost his power of resistance to evil, and is dragged on, an unresisting victim, whithersoever the spirit of perdition may desire to take him? It is true that the young man can plead the power of fascination; all that music, and colour, and blandishment, and flattery can do has been done: the cloven foot has been most successfully concealed; the speech has been all garden, and paradise, and sweetness, and joy; the word hell, or perdition, has not been so much as men-

tioned. This is what is meant by seduction: leading a man out of himself, and from himself, onward and onward, by carefully graded processes, until fascination has accomplished its work, and bound the consenting soul in eternal bondage. (J. Parker, D.D.)

CHAPTER VIII.

VER. 1. Doth not Wisdom cry?—*The personification of Wisdom*:—Whatever may have been the satisfaction experienced by devout minds in reading this chapter, as if it contained the words of Christ and evidence of His pre-existent Divinity, I dare not withhold what I believe to be the true principle of interpretation. The objections to its meaning Christ, or the Word, ere He became flesh, when “in the beginning He was with God, and was God,” are to my mind quite insuperable. For example—1. It should be noticed that the passage is not so applied in any part of the New Testament. Had any New Testament writer expressly applied any part of the chapter to the Son of God, this would have been a key which we could not have been at liberty to refuse. 2. Wisdom here is a female personage. All along this is the case. Now under such a view the Scriptures nowhere else, in any of their figurative representations of “the Christ,” ever thus describe or introduce Him. 3. Wisdom does not appear intended as a personal designation, inasmuch as it is associated with various other terms, of synonymous, or at least of corresponding, import. 4. The whole is a bold and striking personification of the attribute of wisdom, as subsisting in Deity (see ver 12: “I wisdom dwell with prudence, and find out knowledge of witty inventions”). 5. Things which are true of a Divine attribute would naturally be susceptible of application to a Divine person. (R. Wardlaw.)

Ver. 2. She standeth in the top of high places.—*The purpose and range of Wisdom*:—She sets up her tower everywhere, and speaks to all mankind. That is the true wisdom. When we come to understand the purpose and range of true wisdom, our business will be to see how many people we can get in, not how many we can keep out. Sometimes we shall endeavour to enlarge the gate, if haply we may bring some one in who otherwise would be kept outside. Wisdom does not whisper; she cries: she puts forth her voice; she asks the assistance of elevation; where men are found in greatest number she is found in greatest activity. Universality is a proof of the gospel. Any gospel that comes down to play the trick of eclecticism ought to be branded, and dismissed, and never inquired for. We want ministers that will speak to the world, in all its populations, climes, languages, and differences of civilisation and culture. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 4. Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man.—*God revealed in the universe and in humanity*:—The truth, which can guide us to perfection and to happiness, is teaching us always and everywhere. God surrounds us constantly with His instruction. The universal presence of Truth is the subject before us. Wisdom is omnipresent. The greatest truths meet us at every turn. God is on every side, not only by His essential invisible presence, but by His manifestations of power and perfection. We fail to see Him, not from want of light, but from want of spiritual vision. In saying that the great truths of religion are shining all about and within us, I am not questioning the worth of the Christian revelation. The Christian religion concentrates the truth diffused through the universe, and pours it upon the mind with solar lustre. We cannot find language to express the worth of the illumination given through Jesus Christ. But He intends, not that we should hear His voice alone, but that we should open our ears to the countless voices of wisdom, virtue, and piety, which now in whispers, now in thunders, issue from the whole of nature and of life. **I. THE VOICE OF WISDOM**—THAT IS OF MORAL AND RELIGIOUS TRUTH—SPEAKS TO US FROM THE UNIVERSE. Nature everywhere testifies to the infinity of its Author. It proclaims a perfection illimitable, unsearchable, transcending all thought and utterance. There is an impenetrable mystery in every action and force of the universe that envelops our daily existence with wonder, and makes sublime the familiar processes of the

commonest arts. How astonishingly does nature differ in her modes of production from the works of human skill. In nature, vibrating with motion, where is the moving-energy? What and whence is that principle called life—life, that awful power, so endlessly various in the forms it assumes—life that fills earth, air, and sea with motion, growth, activity, and joy—life that enlivens us—what is it? An infinite universe is each moment opened to our view. And this universe is the sign and symbol of infinite power, intelligence, purity, bliss, and love. It is a pledge from the living God of boundless and endless communications of happiness, truth, and virtue. A spiritual voice pervades the universe, which is all the more eloquent because it is spiritual, because it is the voice in which the All-Wise speaks to all intelligences. II. THE VOICE OF WISDOM UTTERS ITSELF FROM THE WORLD OF MORAL AND INTELLIGENT BEINGS, THE HUMANITY OF WHICH WE EACH FORM A PART. This topic is immense, for the book of human nature has no end. New pages are added to it every day through successive generations. Take one great lesson, which all history attests—that there is in human nature an element truly Divine, and worthy of all reverence; that the Infinite which is mirrored in the outward universe is yet more brightly imaged in the inward spiritual world or, in other words, that man has powers and principles, predicting a destiny to which no bounds can be prescribed, which are full of mystery, and even more incomprehensible than those revealed through the material creation. 1. They who disparage human nature do so from ignorance of one of the highest offices of wisdom. The chief work of Wisdom consists in the interpretation of signs. The great aim is to discern what the visible present signifies, what it foreshows, what is to spring from it, what is wrapped up in it as a germ. This actual world may be defined as a world of signs. What we see is but the sign of what is unseen. In life an event is the prophetic sign and forerunner of other coming events. Of human nature we hardly know anything but signs. It has merely begun its development. 2. In estimating human nature most men rest in a half-wisdom, which is worse than ignorance. They who speak most contemptuously of man tell the truth, but only half the truth. Amidst the passions and selfishness of men the wise see another element—a Divine element, a spiritual principle. Half-wisdom is the root of the most fatal prejudice. Man, with all his errors, is a wonderful being, endowed with incomprehensible grandeur, worthy of his own incessant vigilance and care, worthy to be visited with infinite love from heaven. The Infinite is imaged in him more visibly than in the outward universe. This truth is the central principle of Christianity. What is the testimony of human life to the Divine in man? Take the moral principle. What is so common as the idea of right? The whole of human life is a recognition in some way or other of moral distinctions. And no nation has existed, in any age, that has not caught a glimpse at least of the great principles of right and wrong. The right is higher altogether in its essential quality than the profitable, the agreeable, the graceful. It is that which must be done though all other things be left undone, that which must be gained though all else be lost. Every human being is capable of rectitude. The power of resisting evil exists in every man, whether he will exercise it or not. The principle of right in the human heart reveals duty to the individual. Here, then, we learn the greatness of human nature. This moral principle—the supreme law in man—is the law of the universe. Then man and the highest beings are essentially of one order. It is a joyful confirmation of faith thus to find in the human soul plain signatures of a Divine principle, to find faculties allied to the attributes of God, faculties beginning to unfold into God's image, and presages of an immortal life. And such views of human nature will transform our modes of relationship, communication, and association with our fellow-beings. They will exalt us into a new social life. They will transform our fellowship with God. How little we know ourselves! How unjust are we to ourselves! We need a new revelation—not of heaven or hell—but of the Spirit within ourselves. (*W. E. Channing, D.D.*) *The voice of Divine Wisdom* :—I. IT IS A VOICE STRIVING FOR THE EAR OF ALL. II. IT IS A VOICE WORTHY OF THE EAR OF ALL. 1. Her communications are perfect. 2. They are intelligible. 3. Precious. 4. Exhaustless. 5. Rectifying. 6. Original. What Divine Wisdom gives is undeniably unborrowed. (*Homilist.*) *Christ calling to men* :—There are two suitors for the heart of man. The one suggests the pleasures of sense, the other the delights of religion. The earthly suitor is the world, the heavenly suitor is Christ. I. THE SPEAKER. II. THE OBJECT HE HAS IN VIEW. Our salvation: our temporal and eternal happiness. III. THE PERSONS TO WHOM HE SPEAKS. Not to fallen angels, but to the sons of men. He utters His voice in every possible variety of

place, if so be that by any means He might save some. The self-destruction of the impenitent. (*Charles Clayton, M.A.*) *The matter of Wisdom's speech*:—Her exhortation. Her commendation. I. GOD'S ESPECIAL CARE IS FOR MEN. 1. Because there is no creature upon earth more to be wondered at than man. 2. Because God hath made him more capable of instruction than other creatures. 3. Because man is most capable of getting good by instruction. 4. Because God sent His Son into the world to become man for the good of man. II. GOD LOOKS THAT MAN SHOULD LEARN. 1. God takes great pains with him. 2. God is at great cost with him. III. ALL SORTS OF MEN MAY BE TAUGHT BY WISDOM'S VOICE. 1. There is a capacity left in mean men. 2. Common gifts of illumination are bestowed on mean men, as well as great ones. It reproves great men if they are ignorant; and men of meaner rank cannot be excused if they are ignorant. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Wisdom offered to the sons of men*:—Wisdom shows herself to be truly wise by recognising the different capacities and qualities of men: "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man." Children who are at school are accustomed to distinguish between *vir* and *homines*—between the strong and the weak. "Unto you, O men, I call"—strong, virile, massive—"and my voice is to the sons of man"—the lesser, the weaker, the more limited in capacity, but men still—and I will accommodate my speech to the capacity of every one, for I have come to bring the world to the temple of understanding. Then there is further discrimination; we read of the "simple" and of the "fools." "Simple" is a word which, as we have often seen, has been abused. There ought to be few lovelier words than "simple"—without fold, or duplicity, or complexity, or involution: such ought to be the meaning of simple and simplicity. Wisdom comes to fools, and says she will work miracles. Could a man say, "I am too far gone for Wisdom to make anything of me," he would by his very confession prove that he was still within the range of salvation. "To know one's self diseased is half the cure": to know one's self to be ignorant is to have taken several steps on the way to the sanctuary of wisdom. This might be Christ speaking; yea, there are men who have not hesitated to say that by "Wisdom" in this chapter is meant the Wisdom of God in history, the Logos, the eternal Son of God. Certainly, the wisdom of this chapter seems to follow the very course which Jesus Christ Himself pursued: He will call all men to Himself—the simple, and the foolish, and the far away; He will make room for all. A wonderful house is God's house in that way, so flexible, so expansive; there is always room for the man who is not yet in. So Wisdom will have men, and sons of man; simple men, foolish men. By this universality of the offer judge the Divinity of the origin. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The universal call of the gospel*:—I. THE CALL OF THE TEXT TO SPIRITUAL DUTY IS ADDRESSED TO ALL MEN. II. CALLS AND INVITATIONS SERVE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT PURPOSES. 1. They show us our duty and obligation. 2. They show the connection betwixt the state to which we are called and the enjoyment of the blessing promised. 3. They point out and hold before us what must be accomplished in us, if ever we be saved. 4. They are intended to shut us up to the faith now revealed. 5. They are designed to show us what we ought to pray for. 6. They are to shut us out of all so-called neutral ground in spiritual things. (*John Bonar.*)

Ver. 5. **Ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart.**—*Are you a fool?*—The word "fool" is derived from a Latin verb, signifying "to be inflated with air"; substantive, "a wind-bag." So a fool is a witless, blundering creature, one whose conduct is not directed by ordinarily good sense or judgment. All who do not serve God are fools, according to the Bible way of looking at things. Many are Bible fools who are not fools according to the world's idea. I. HE IS A FOOL WHO BUYS THE WEALTH OF THE WORLD WITH THE RICHES OF HEAVEN. Does not the soul far outvalue the body? Is not eternity greater than time? Thousands choose the tinsel before the real gold, as did the wicked cardinal, who said, "I prefer a part in the honours of Paris to a part in the happiness of heaven." II. HE IS A FOOL WHO SUPPOSES HE CAN FREELY INDULGE IN SIN, AND STILL KEEP IT UNDER HIS CONTROL. Men say they will go so far in the direction of this or that sin, and then stop short. As well might a man allow his train of loaded waggons to run down a steep declivity, until half the descent was made, before he applied the brakes. Dr. Johnson says, "The diminutive chains of habit are generally too small to be felt till they are too strong to be broken." III. HE IS A FOOL WHO, HAVING ONCE RECEIVED INJURY, RECKLESSLY EXPOSES HIMSELF TO IT A SECOND TIME. In other words, He is a fool who learns nothing from his own folly. The wise man is a wary man; and having received

injury in any direction once, he keeps clear of that coast ever after. "Experience," one has said, "is one of the most eloquent of preachers; but she never has a large congregation." IV. HE IS A FOOL WHO WAITS TILL TO-MORROW BEFORE HE BECOMES RELIGIOUS. What has any one to do with to-morrow? Does he know that he will ever see it? Men may trifle with their religious opportunities until they are lost beyond recall. Until you enter fully and lovingly into the service of God you are living like fools, because unnecessarily imperilling your highest and most urgent interests—because you are living at enmity with Him in whose favour is everlasting life, and in whose displeasure is everlasting death. (*A. F. Forrest.*)

Ver. 6. **Hear; for I will speak of excellent things.**—*The excellency of wisdom*:—Wisdom is represented as making a public appearance in a rude, ignorant, and corrupt world, loudly proclaiming her doctrines and counsels, and calling upon all men to hearken to them. What consideration could be more powerful to engage their attention than this, that she speaketh of "excellent things": the opening of her lips is of "right things," and her mouth speaketh "truth." I propose to show that this is the just character of the instructions and precepts of religious virtue. I. THE EXCELLENCE OF THE DOCTRINES AND INJUNCTIONS OF WISDOM, ABSOLUTELY AND IN THEMSELVES. We must fix an idea of excellence, making it the standard whereby to try everything which pretendeth to that character. There must be some common and plain rule wherein all men are agreed, and which must have so deep a foundation in nature as the necessary invariable determination of our minds. If you suppose the character of excellent and right to be the result of arbitrary human constitutions, it would never be uniform. But our notions of excellent and right are before the consideration of all laws, appointments, orders, and instructions whatsoever; for we bring all these to the test in our own minds, and try them by a sense which we have prior to any of them. Nor does this sense depend on any positive declaration of God's will. The original idea of excellence is essential to our nature. It is one of those perceptions to which we are necessarily determined when the object fitted to excite it is presented to us. There is a test, or power of discerning, in the mind. And this discerns the excellency of religious things. Set right and true against their opposites, in any case wherein you are competent judges, and you will see to which of them your own minds must necessarily give the preference. There is eternal truth in all God's testimonies; they are founded on self-evident maxims. II. COMPARE THE DOCTRINES AND PRECEPTS OF WISDOM WITH OTHER THINGS WHICH ARE MOST VALUED BY MAN, AND SHOW THEIR SUPERIOR WORTH. That wisdom is better than rubies, pearls, or whatever else can be described in this world, is shown—1. In that none of them come up to the character of excellence before insisted on, and which must be attributed to wisdom. They all have only a limited and relative worth. 2. The most precious treasures of this world are not valued but with some regard to virtue, but religious wisdom is necessarily esteemed excellent independently of them, and without any manner of regard to them. 3. The things of this world, which rival wisdom in our esteem, have many inconveniences attending the acquisition and use of them, which do not affect this invaluable possession. Application: (1) We should hear the counsels of wisdom, make it our choice, and use our utmost endeavours to attain it. (2) We should entertain our minds with the excellency of wisdom as a very agreeable contemplation. (3) The excellence of wisdom should affect the characters of men in our esteem, and regulate our regards to them. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. **For my mouth shall speak truth.**—*The doctrines of religion have their evidence in themselves*:—I. CONFIRM AND ILLUSTRATE THIS PROPOSITION. 1. Those things which religion requires of us are such as Reason herself, when she forms her judgment aright, cannot but approve, or, at most, cannot justly refuse her assent to them. This will appear with respect to the practical commands and duties of religion. The duties which seem to bear hardest upon human nature are repentance, mortification, contempt of this world, loving our enemies, suffering persecution for righteousness' sake, and the like; which do all recommend themselves to our minds by their reasonableness. Though we have not the same clue of reason to conduct us through all the high mysteries of our faith, yet here also reason will justify us in yielding a firm and uncontroverted assent of mind to them, as having solid grounds of authority to rely upon, for the belief of them, which cannot possibly deceive us. II. THE CONCURRENT JUDGMENT AND APPROBATION OF ALL WISE AND GOOD MEN BOTH AS TO THE EVIDENCE AND REASONABLENESS OF THESE DOCTRINES

AND LAWS. The judgment of such persons ought to be of great weight and moment, as being a judgment based on personal experience. These men not only know the truth, but feel such a sensible force and power of it upon their minds, as both enlightens their understanding to discern its real excellency, and gently bends their wills to receive and embrace it. Faith is no hasty and blind credulity, but a sober and rational assent of mind, built upon sure and solid principles. III. SUCH PERSONS AS HAVE NO UNJUST PREJUDICES AGAINST RELIGION PREVAILING IN THEIR MINDS WILL SOONER BE BROUGHT TO EXAMINE THE SEVERAL PROOFS AND TESTIMONIES OF ITS TRUTH AND DIVINE AUTHORITY. A fair examination of these proofs will not fail of giving them entire satisfaction. In dealing with the Jews, our Lord Jesus appealed to the consonancy of His doctrine with their own established law. He submitted His life and doctrine to their trial. IV. THEY WHO FAIRLY EXAMINE THE TRUTHS OF RELIGION, AND ARE DISPOSED TO EMBRACE THEM UPON SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE, SHALL HAVE THAT INTERNAL ILLUMINATION OF GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT WHICH SHALL CLEARLY DISCOVER THE EXCELLENCY AND AGREEABLENESS OF THEM TO THEIR MINDS. God will not give them a full and intuitive view into the great and sublime mysteries of religion. God will give such knowledge as our present faculties can receive. 1. Religion is very plain and intelligible to all those who are willing to understand it. 2. Prejudice gains an almost invincible power over the minds of men. 3. The more men improve in the knowledge and practice of religion, the greater will be their satisfaction in it. The best men will have the most important secrets of God's will revealed to them. (*John Cornwall, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. Receive my instruction, and not silver.—*The commendation of wisdom:*—**I. KNOWLEDGE MUST BE RECEIVED.** 1. Do not refuse knowledge offered you in the Book of God. 2. Do not refuse instruction offered you by God's ministers. **II. KNOWLEDGE MUST BE RECEIVED BY WAY OF INSTRUCTION.** Instruction is necessary, as it does not come by nature, and God does not teach it now by miracle. **III. KNOWLEDGE MUST BE MORE READILY RECEIVED THAN SILVER OR GOLD.** It can do that which gold and silver can never do. It is the best riches. More is gotten by labouring for knowledge than for money. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Ver. 11. For wisdom is better than rubies.—*Rubies:*—This jewel is called a sardius in two places in the Bible. The name comes from the Latin "Ruber," which means red, and this name is given to the ruby because of its colour. It is sometimes called a carbuncle. We may regard the ruby as representing love or charity. What is there about the ruby on account of which love or charity may be compared to it? What did people in olden times think the ruby could do? **I. CURE SORROW.** It was thought that a ruby had the power of driving away sadness from their hearts, or of curing their sorrows. That was not true, but this is true—if we have this ruby, a heart of love to Jesus, it will help to cure our own sorrows, and help us to cure other people. **II. SHINE IN THE DARK.** Stories used to be told of rubies and other jewels being employed, instead of lamps, in dark caverns, to give light, just as if they had power in themselves to shine like so many suns. But this was a mistake. It is only true of the Bible ruby. Real love to anybody, and especially the love of Jesus, will shine in the dark. And when we speak of love shining in the dark, we mean that it will give us help and comfort in trouble. It will make us able to do and suffer things that we never could do without it. **III. KEEP THEM FROM HARM.** People used to carry a ruby about them as a sort of charm. It is only the Bible ruby that can keep from danger. Loving and trusting God will be a true charm. The ruby heart will keep us from getting hurt. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *The supreme worth of wisdom:*—What does Wisdom offer? She offers to surpass in value everything that men have yet honoured with their appreciation. She will put aside rubies, and things that are to be desired, and all gold, and she will stand alone, absolutely unique in worth. Gold may be lost, rubies may be stolen; desire may say, "I cannot pant and gasp any longer, I have been filled to satiety; let me die." Nor are these things to be ignored as to their temporary value and uses. He is a foolish man who despises gold and rubies and pearls and choice silver: he is more foolish still who thinks they can buy him anything that he can take into eternity with him. In death all these things leave the possessor. That is a mournful reality. May not a man take the family jewels with him? No, not one. Must he go into the other world empty-handed. Yes, empty-handed: he brought nothing into this world, and it is certain he can carry nothing out. Then we have only a life-right in them? Is there anything that will

go with a man clear through to the other spaces? Yes: character will go with him. The man's character is the man himself. The wise man has the key of all the worlds. And the fool has the key of none of them. He who is without wisdom is without riches. He who has wisdom has all wealth. The wise man is never solitary. He has the thoughts of ages. He is a silent prophet; he will not write his prophecies, but oh, how they make him glow, how they send a radiance into his vision, how they make him despise the charms, seductions, and blandishments of a lying world that rattles the bag of its emptiness to prove its treasure! (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 12. **I, Wisdom, dwell with Prudence.**—*Prudence*:—This has been brought into unmerited contempt by being associated with what is really its opposite. The abuse of the title has led to practical evils. Individuals have been known to despise prudence as the most beggarly of the virtues, from a mistaken apprehension of its qualities. Marking the errors of the niggardly—the muck-worms of society—some persons conclude at once against the utility of prudence, and read the text, “There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth,” in a perverted sense. Nothing will they save, or provide for; and so against imprudence in one extreme they set up imprudence in the other. There is no such short cut to happiness; the spendthrift is as far off from felicity as the save-all. The only security lies in a positive assertion and practical affirmation of the whole doctrine and discipline of prudence in its purity and truth. We must conceive the right idea of Prudence, properly define her characteristics, arrive at an honest appreciation of her gifts and graces, and devote ourselves to her, as her faithful ministrants, in all her relations, social, intellectual, and moral. Such a prudence is co-mate with the loftiest wisdom. The prudential course of conduct would commend itself as an illustration of the most elevated philosophy. It would be at one with the most benevolent and beneficent impulses of the human heart, and at the same time insure the true interests of every individual who acted in obedience to its precepts. (*The Scottish Pulpit*.) *Of religious prudence*:—According to the general design of these proverbial writings, wisdom stands before religion, and religion is expressed by the fear of God. Prudence is either universal or particular. Universal prudence is the same with the doctrine of morality, the application of the most proper means, viz., virtuous actions, towards the acquiring the chief end, the happiness of man. And particular prudence is distinguished by the different objects and ends about which it is conversant, and is the prosecution of any lawful design by such methods as shall appear to be best, upon a due consideration of circumstances. The text asserts that there is an inseparable connection between religion and prudence. Neither can be without the other. **I. THERE IS NO TRUE POLITICAL PRUDENCE, BUT WHAT IS FOUNDED UPON RELIGION, OR THE FEAR OF GOD.** God has delivered the government of the world to men, reserving to Himself a power over nature and a prerogative over all human counsels and actions. The first corruption in natural philosophy consisted in pretending to give an account of the world and its original, without an infinite understanding and first mover. And the main corruption of prudence consists in attempting the government of the world by human policy, without a due submission to the providence of God. Proud reasoners, and the sensual part of mankind, either wholly deny a providence or attribute very little to its superintendency and power. The universal history of the world, and the particular histories of nations and families, are full of the tragical end of those proud politicians who thought to govern without God, and to be prudent without religion. A natural sagacity is not sufficient for man, who is accountable for his actions, who must engage on no designs but what are rational, nor pursue them by any means but what are just and lawful. The wisdom that degenerates into craft is really mischievous folly. An uprightness of action, a constancy in virtue, and an unmovable frame of mind and resolution of always pursuing what is just and beneficial to the public, by right and laudable ways, will make a man fortunate, valuable, and revered—fit for any trust. **II. THE PIOUS PERSON IN THE MAIN IS THE TRULY JUDICIOUS.** Wisdom is the knowledge of things great, admirable, and Divine, whereby the mind is raised and enlarged into delightful contemplations; and prudence is a right practical judgment, or the skill of judging what we are to do, and what not, and of distinguishing between good and evil, and the degrees of each. The ancient moralists never allowed a wicked man to be prudent. They declare that a wicked life corrupts the very principles of true prudence and right reason. Prudence is that virtue or power of the soul whereby the mind deliberates

rightly, and finds out what is best to be done, when all things are considered; or it helps us to discover what are the best means for obtaining a good end. Now it is religion that qualifies the mind to consider practical matters in their true nature and consequences; that purifies the intention, corrects the inclination, moderates the affections, and make our deliberations calm and wise. It is the fear of God that sets bounds to prudence, that shows how far we are to act in any undertaking, and where we are to resign things up to a higher Conduct. It is temperance that gives us intellectual vigour, that makes us masters of our reason. These, and such-like virtues, being the prerequisites, or ingredients, of all true prudence, it is the pious man that in the main is the truly judicious person. But it is the truly pious man. It is a very imperfect notion of prudence to think that it consists in an exact knowledge of the world, or in getting a large share and possession of it.

III. THAT PARTICULAR PRUDENCE WHICH IS REQUIRED IN THE CONDUCT OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE. 1. The first rule for the more prudent conduct of a religious life is, not to engage in things which are above our sphere. 2. Not presently to catch at perfection and the highest instances of piety. There is an order of duties, and a gradual advancement in religion. Enthusiasts make mad work with religion. 3. Not to engage too vehemently in things of an indifferent nature. 4. Not to spoil a good constitution of soul by any superstitious fancies or unnecessary scruples of conscience. Piety alone keeps men in the right, the safe, the pleasant path. (*Bp. T. Mannyngham.*) *True prudence*:—Many men are prudent who are not wise—that is to say, they are superficially cautious, sagacious, calculating; but they are never wise. True wisdom is the metaphysic of prudence. It is the innermost life and reality, and it expresses itself in the large prudence which sees more points than can be seen by mere cleverness. He that seeketh his life shall lose it; he that will throw away his life for Christ's sake shall find it, and shall thus prove himself in the long run to be the truly prudent man. Beware of the prudence that is as a skeleton. The true prudence is the living body, inhabited by a living soul—the soul is wisdom. Sometimes wisdom will drive a man to do apparently foolish things—at least, things that cannot be understood by those who live in rectangles, two inches by one and a half. But “Wisdom is justified of her children”; she calmly abides the issue of the third day, and raised again, she vindicates her origin and declares her destiny. (*J. Carter, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.*—*Hatred of evil*:—A formal definition of the fear of the Lord. To dread the punishment of sin seems to be the main feature in that religion which, under many forms, springs native in the human heart. This is the mainspring which sets and keeps all the machinery of superstition going. It was a maxim of heathen antiquity, that “Fear made God.” To fear retribution is not to hate sin. It is a solemn suggestion that ever the religion of dark, unrenewed men is, in its essence, a love of their own sins. Instead of hating sin themselves, their grand regret is that God hates it. If they could be convinced that the Judge would regard it as lightly as the culprit, the fear would collapse like steam under cold water, and all the religious machinery which it drove would stand still. All the false religions that have ever desolated the earth are sparks from the collision of these two hard opposites—God's hate of sin, and man's love for it. In Christ only may this sore derangement be healed. It is when sin is forgiven that a sinner can hate it. Instead of hating God for His holiness, the forgiven man instinctively loathes the evil of his own heart, and looks with longing for the day when all things in it shall be made new. Such is the blessed fruit of pardon when it comes to a sinner through the blood of Christ. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *A hidden token of the fear towards God*:—It is not merely in enlightenment of mind that the fear towards God has its result. “By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.” This departing from evil is the practical manifestation of a principle; it is habitual practice founded on a strong conviction of duty. In this text, the fear of the Lord is connected with the inward feeling of dislike for evil. Hatred, like love, is of the heart. I. THIS FEAR MUST NOT BE MISUNDERSTOOD AS TO ITS NATURE. It may be twofold. The alarm that is awakened by the threat of violence, or of immediate privation, is one kind of fear. This is the fear of dread, or terror. The other kind of fear is of respect or reverence, and this can only dwell in the heart of a friend towards a friend, or of a faithful servant towards a master worthy of esteem, or of a dutiful child towards an honoured parent. This is the “fear of the Lord.” What other fear should God be desirous of receiving and acknowledging at their hands? II. IF THERE BE THIS FEAR, THERE

WILL ALSO BE THE HATRED OF EVIL. The Holy One cannot be so indulgent as to put no difference between godly fear and the love of sin. God hates evil as abhorrent from His holy nature. To require that we hate evil is no more than what the holiness of His own character requires from Himself. This requirement shows that God would draw us nearer to Himself. As He hates evil, He would have us hate it. (*J. Rhenius, M.A.*)

Ver. 14. I have understanding ; I have strength.—*The self-assertion of Christ :—* Here is more than a florid personification of wisdom. It is the Word who is from everlasting—"Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." **I. THE SELF-ASSERTION OF CHRIST.** Exhibited in three ways. 1. Christ claims a boundless power of satisfying human wants. 2. Christ claims for Himself the most transcendent ideals. 3. Christ claims the possession of absolute truth, by the very form and mode, as well as by the substance, of His teaching. **II. THE BEARING OF THAT SELF-ASSERTION ON CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES OF OUR DAY.** Take the tone of much of the record in the Old Testament. 1. The Old Testament is a progressive system. Then much of it must be imperfect. 2. The Old Testament contains the pathology and diagnosis of sin. In meeting the difficulties of the Old Testament, the self-assertion of the "Amen" is our stay. He who spake the words given in Matt. v. 17, 18, knew the Old Testament. We talk of the extermination of the Canaanites. Are we gentler than He? We are offended by the polygamy of the patriarchs. Can we survey marriage with a purer gaze than that of the virgin eye which is also the eye of God? We take the book as it is from the hand of Him who says, "I am understanding." 3. Take the general sources of unbelief and their salient characteristics. The source of unbelief is not always genuine thought, it is often feebleness of character and moral enervation. The secret of strength is to believe in Him who says, "I have strength." (*Abp. W. Alexander.*)

Ver. 15. By Me kings reign.—*Christian loyalty :—* **I. THE SPECIAL CAUSE THAT WE HAVE FOR INCREASED THANKFULNESS TO GOD.** 1. We ought to be thankful for any event which tends to secure the blessings of peace to our country. 2. A state of peace, as it is most conducive to the temporal interests of a nation, so too it is essential to the interests of true religion. **II. THE DUTY OF PRAYING CONSTANTLY AND EARNESTLY FOR THOSE WHO ARE LAWFULLY SET OVER US.** (*H. W. Sullivan, M.A.*) *Civil governments and their subjects :—* In this chapter is the figure of speech known as *prosopœia*, or personification, in which any eminent quality or distinct attribute is invested with personal powers and properties, and is said to hear, to speak, to govern, to suffer, or to enjoy, and indeed, whatever else a person amongst us is capable of doing. Jesus Christ, the Messiah, is the personal and essential Wisdom of God. Here one of His prerogatives is affirmed—He has supreme control and authoritative influence over the great ones of the earth. The administration of all things in the natural and providential, as well as in the spiritual kingdom, is confided into His hands. **I. CIVIL GOVERNMENT IS OF DIVINE INSTITUTION ; IT IS AN ORDINANCE OF GOD.** It is not the creature of chance ; nor founded in the social compact ; or by a sort of conventionality understood between the governed and the governors ; but is based on the will of God. 1. Prove this by appeal to reason. God formed mankind with a view to happiness, and civil government is necessary to happiness. There can be no happiness without order, security, freedom. It never has been known that human beings, in any large numbers, have existed for any considerable time without the intervention of governments. 2. Prove this by appeal to Scripture (Rom. xiii. 1-3 ; 1 Pet. 2-13). God is not the author of any specific form or mode of government in His Holy Word. In the case of Israel God dictated the special system of political government known as the Theocracy. But in other cases the mode of government is left to the suggestions of human wisdom, the improvements of time, and the claims and requirements of experience and of circumstances. **II. THE DUTIES WHICH SUBJECTS OWE TO THEIR CIVIL GOVERNMENT.** 1. Reverence and respect, for conscience' sake, and for the Lord's sake. The language of censure never becomes a subject towards his ruler but under the four following restrictions—(1) That this censure be founded in truth. (2) That we have a good motive in uttering it. (3) That we have a right end. (4) That we preserve due candour, moderation, and allowance. 2. Obedience to the laws. Disobedience to the laws is a sin against the public, and a virtual attack upon the social character of man. 3. Our proportion of contribution to the exigencies of the State. 4. We owe to our rulers

to defend and support them in the lawful exercise of their authority. 5. And earnest prayer to God for His blessing upon them. This is the dictate of common benevolence, and is sanctioned and enjoined by a regard to the public welfare. It is the official character of the civil governor that is the ground upon which prayer is claimed for him. The direction of the faculties and talents and influence of the individual must materially interfere with the safety and happiness of the community. We may, therefore, wisely implore God to assist in their counsels those whom, in His providence, He has exalted. (*G. Clayton, M.A.*)

The connection of our Lord Christ with earthly sovereignty:—I. THE GIFTS WHICH OUR LORD CHRIST HAS RECEIVED FOR US. 1. The speaker. Wisdom personified. Wisdom in itself is perfect only in God. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. He is called "the Word," which is wisdom manifested in utterance, and issuing in streams of blessings. 2. The gifts. Counsel, or practical wisdom. Sound wisdom, or inward principles. Understanding, shown in refusing the evil and choosing the good. Strength, the gift necessary to complete the other gifts. 3. For whom has the Redeemer these gifts? Generally, for the human race. Specially for kings, and all that are in authority. II. *THE CONNECTION OF OUR LORD WITH THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE EARTH.* The true sovereignty of the whole earth belongs to our Lord Christ. All other power is simply derived from Him. (*E. Bickersteth.*)

*Thanksgiving to Almighty God:—*The origin of kings may be traced as far back as authentic history extends. The kings engaged in the Persian wars appear to be among the first of whom any regular historical connection may be relied upon; indeed, we must have recourse to the sacred writings of the Jews for the earliest historical information. The Jewish historians frequently impute their national calamities to the vices of their monarchs. The words of this text imply—1. A delegated authority, given by God Himself, in the appointment of kings and rulers. 2. That all earthly crowns must perish—that all earthly sovereigns are mortal. It is incumbent on all sincere Christians on special national occasions to acknowledge with gratitude the hand of Almighty God, and to adorn the Divine providence which superintends all worldly affairs; and let us rest assured that the exercise of almighty power and infinite goodness is combined with that mercy which is so strikingly exhibited throughout the vast range of creation, and which will be abundantly manifested in the realms of unfading glory. (*N. Meeres, B.D.*)

*Good government:—I. Magistrates cannot rule well without wisdom. They need wisdom in consultation and in execution. 2. Men cannot make good laws without wisdom. In regard of matter or manner. 3. Princes cannot rule well without just laws. Bless God that we live under laws, and are not left to the mere will of men. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)*

*The wisdom behind civil government:—*If good laws against ill manners be, as sure they are, decrees of justice, these kings and princes, with inferior magistrates, will be the governing societies, here on earth, for public reformation. Civil rulers should be considered as subordinate to that ever-blessed society of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit above, the one God who, through the one Mediator between God and man, hath graciously vouchsafed to concern Himself for the reformation of a degenerate world, that iniquity might not be, at least so speedily or universally, its ruin. I. *THE TENDENCY OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT TO PUBLIC REFORMATION, IN WHICH THE COMMON SAFETY AND HAPPINESS IS SO MANIFESTLY CONCERNED.* The very decreeing of justice, or the justice in good and wholesome laws decreed, has a natural and evident tendency to public reformation, with all its implied and consequent advantages. Ill manners have given the occasion to many good laws, which, though they serve to direct and confirm the good, yet are principally designed to correct and reform the bad. It is wrong and weakness to attempt government by mere compulsion. All fit methods of dealing with men must take hold of some principles, allowed or presumed, if not confessed. The great business of good laws will be more effectually to repress the overt acts of those vicious inclinations which so often lead men, in particular cases, contrary to the general dictates of their own deliberate judgment and conscience. See the matter and measure of some of the principal decrees of justice; as—1. To God; that He be not openly affronted by the denial of His being, neglect of evident duty, and daring commission of notorious sin. 2. To the community; that private interests give way to that of the public. 3. To the magistrate; that all needful defence be provided, with a power sufficient for the asserting of his just authority. 4. To subjects more generally considered. The saving and securing to them those rights and liberties which are due, whether by common reason or the particular reason

and fundamental contract. 5. To the poor; that the disabled and destitute be maintained; that the able and willing want not work, nor the idle a spur to labour. 6. To offenders themselves; that the justly obnoxious go not unpunished, nor yet their punishment outweigh the offence. 7. To persons of merit. Honour and other rewards are surely a point of justice due to such. Surely such decrees of justice are a public testimony for virtuous actions, and against the contrary vices. Whilst the preceptive part of such decrees recommends virtuous actions to the understanding, their sanctions of reward and punishment most fitly serve to press them on the will, as powerfully moving those two great springs of human action—hope and fear. The execution of just decrees gives a standing and open confirmation to them, as being the abiding sense of our rulers. They have evidently been well weighed and wisely resolved. II. THE SON OF GOD, THE REFORMING, SAVING WISDOM, ON WHOM GOVERNMENT DEPENDS. The term "son" is taken from amongst men, and though it cannot exactly agree to Him who is the Son of God, yet certainly intends to lead us to some such apprehensions about Him as may be allowed to our weakness, and will be sufficient for our purpose. The salvation of men is everywhere in Sacred Writ represented as the great design and business of this Wisdom, which well knows that pride, arrogancy, and the evil way will never comport with the peace and welfare of men either in their single or social capacity. The government of the Son as Mediator is to be founded in redemption, and exercised in a way of reformation. Religion in a degenerate world is but another name for reformation: especially the Christian religion, which was to correct not only the irreligion but also the superstitions of the world. It has been the care of our gracious Redeemer to recover the declining reformation under the happy influence of present governments. III. THE MORE IMMEDIATE DEPENDENCE OF CIVIL GOVERNMENT ON THE SON OF GOD. True it is that our Saviour's kingdom is not of a secular but spiritual nature: but His subjects are embodied spirits, and have their temporal as well as eternal concerns. Civil government decrees justice—1. By our Saviour's purchase and procurement. 2. Providential disposal. 3. Counsel and aid. 4. Appointment and authority. (*Joshua Oldfield.*) *The Divine right of kings:—*I. THE AUTHORITY OR RIGHT BY WHICH KINGS REIGN. Monarchs and their authority have an acknowledged cause, and that cause external to themselves. All is derived from some other person. The person who speaks in this passage could be no other than the eternal Son of God. When St. John beheld our Lord in the Apocalypse, he saw Him as the fount and origin of government, with many crowns upon His head. Meet it was that the kings of the several quarters of the world should have their being by Him who is King of all the world; that all crowns, both the crown of glory in heaven and the crown of highest glory on earth, should be held of Him. By Christ, the Wisdom of God, and the Son of God, monarchs hold their rule and kingdoms are governed. They reign not by His mere leave, but by His express commission. They reign in Him and by Him. He reigns in them and by them; He in them as His deputies, they in Him as their authoriser; He by their persons, they by His power. II. THE ACT OF REIGNING. Consider it in three different ways. That they reign at all; that they reign long; that they reign well. Each of these is alike the gift of God. By Him, His co-eternal Word and Wisdom, as by a door, they enter on their reign. By Him, as by a line which He stretches over every government, be it longer or shorter, they hold its continuance. Finally, by Him, as by a rule, they reign; they walk before the Lord their God; consider whom they represent, whose ministers and vicegerents they are. It is duration that constitutes a reign. Now, without any question, this depends on God. When they have begun they may end quickly, if He who create do not also preserve. And so that right reigning, upon which only a continuance of reign is promised. Can we believe that the complicated machinery of government can be preserved if religion be neglected? But our business now is with subjects, not kings. What has been said imposes duty on them. And even as, if princes considered by whom they reign, they would reign better, so also, if subjects remembered the same truth, they would obey better. For if from Him comes the authority, to Him is the duty of allegiance; and we are bound to be subject, not for wrath only, but also for conscience sake. Remember who it is that speaks. He is Christ, and he is called Wisdom. If Christ speaks, disloyalty and disaffection are anti-Christian. If Wisdom speaks, they are folly. Folly in itself, and folly in its consequences. Let Wisdom, then, be still justified in her children. (*G. S. Cornish, M.A.*) *Per me reges regnant:—*How do men claim to be kings? how do they hold their sovereign

authority? by whose grant? Of the four words of the motto, the two latter (*reges and regnant*) be two as great matters as any be in the world. One, the persons themselves, as they be kings. The other, the act of their reigning, or bearing rule over nations. These two latter words depend on the two former—*per me*. By and through Him kings were first settled in their reigns. By and through Him ever since upholden in their reigns. By and through Him vouchsafed many miraculous preservations in their reigns. I. **KINGS AND KINGDOMS HAVE THEIR "PER."** They are no casualties. There is a cause of a king's reigning. That cause is a person. "By Me"—that is, not man or angel, but God only; God manifest. By Him—1. Because He was man. 2. Because He is wisdom. 3. Because on Him the Father hath conferred all the kingdoms of the earth. III. **KINGS REIGN.** Consider this reigning three ways. 1. As it hath a beginning. 2. As it hath continuance. 3. As it hath rectitude or obliquity incident to every act. These three are duly set on every king's head through all the story of the Bible. Such a king is said to have been so many years old when he began to reign. He reigned in Jerusalem, or Samaria, so many years. And he reigned well or ill. (*Bp. Lancelot Andrewes.*) *The authority of Divine Wisdom* :—Wisdom here speaks of herself as the queen of the world. Wisdom, in the exercise of her authority—I. **DETERMINES THE DESTINY OF RULERS.** 1. It inspires all the good actions of kings. 2. It controls all the bad actions of kings. II. **HAS A SPECIAL REGARD FOR THE GOOD.** Divine wisdom has heart as well as intellect; it glows with sympathies as well as radiates with counsels. III. **HAS THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE CHOICEST BLESSINGS FOR MANKIND.** (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 17. **I love them that love Me.**—*Emotion and evidence* :—The mind must reach religion's creed by help of the heart. Reason is not to be set aside, but, with the value of the rational faculty exalted to its highest honour, the affections of the heart must constantly aid the rational faculty if it is expected to accomplish much in the realm of moral truth. There must be an attuning of the two instruments, the objective truth and the subjective man, such that the music of the former may not be rejected as a discord or lost because inaudible. Wisdom has always distributed her truth to those who love her. Those special ideas called "religion" will become truths or doctrines only by help of the heart's friendship. Unless men can reach some wish in their favour, some partiality for them, it is hardly to be supposed that mere logic will ever force them upon individual or public practices. The power of the mind to reject conclusions not welcome to the feelings is enormous. It is possible that the poverty of evidence, confessed in this world to exist as to vast moral propositions, comes from the fact that earth was made, not for a wicked but for a virtuous race. Sin may have destroyed evidence by destroying the sentiments that made it visible. The exact sciences proclaim their ideas to all, and ask no favour of any kind. The evidences of Christianity must be weighed by a mind not averse to virtue, not averse to the being and presence of a just God, but full of tender sympathy with man. By a soul capable of sadness and of hope. (*David Swing.*) *The characters whom Christ loves* :—The love which Christ entertains for His people is an affection the nature and extent of which can be learned only from a consideration of the causes which produce it. I. **THE FOUNDATION OF THAT LOVE WAS LAID IN ETERNITY.** II. **CHRIST LOVES THOSE WHO LOVE HIM BECAUSE HE HAS DONE AND SUFFERED SO MUCH FOR THEIR SALVATION.** He purchased them with His blood. From the birth to the death of His people He watches over them with unremitting attention. He forgives their sins, alleviates their sorrows, sympathises in their trials, heals their backslidings, wipes away their tears, listens to their prayers, intercedes for them with His Father, enables them to persevere, and accompanies them through the valley of the shadow of death. All this care and attention naturally tends to increase His love for them. III. **CHRIST LOVES THOSE WHO LOVE HIM BECAUSE THEY ARE UNITED TO HIM BY STRONG AND INDISSOLUBLE TIES.** The union between Christ and His people is presented under various figures—bridegroom and bride, vine and branches, head and members, soul and body. The bond of this union on our part is faith, but the union itself is formed by the appointment of God. IV. **CHRIST LOVES THOSE WHO LOVE HIM BECAUSE THEY POSSESS HIS SPIRIT AND BEAR HIS IMAGE.** Similarity of character always tends to produce affection, and hence every being in the universe loves his own image whenever he discovers it. Christ loves His own image in His creatures because it essentially consists in holiness, which is of all things most pleasing to His Father and Himself. V. **CHRIST LOVES THOSE WHO LOVE HIM BECAUSE THEY REJOICE IN**

AND RETURN HIS AFFECTION. It is the natural tendency of love to produce and increase love. Even those whom we have long loved on account either of their relation to us or of their amiable qualities become incomparably more dear to us when they begin to prize our love and return it. Improvement: 1. This subject may enable every one to answer the important question, Does Christ love me? 2. If Christ loves those who love Him, then He will love those most who are most ready to return His affection, to do all things, and to suffer all things for His sake. 3. How happy are they who love! What happiness, then, must they enjoy who love and are beloved by the infinite fountain of love, God's eternal Son! 4. These truths afford most powerful motives to induce sinners to love Christ. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *To whom will Wisdom give her good things?*—On them that love her she will bestow love again. On them that seek her aright she will bestow herself. There is great use of Wisdom, and she hath great store of wealth to bestow. How shall we obtain this Wisdom? Love her and get her. Love is the best Master of Arts, the surest teacher. As the good fruit of the study of Wisdom is very great, so the labour of them that respect her is not in vain. They shall enjoy both her love and herself. I. WISDOM LOVES SUCH AS LOVE HER. II. WISDOM MUST BE SOUGHT FOR EARLY AND DILIGENTLY. III. SUCH AS SEEK FOR WISDOM DILIGENTLY SHALL FIND HER. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *The love of wisdom necessary to the attaining of it:*—I. EXPLAIN THE LOVE OF WISDOM, AND SHOW THE SENTIMENTS AND DISPOSITIONS THAT ARE IMPORTED IN IT. The affections and passions of the human nature are the moving springs which set our active powers at work. Various are the methods by which the objects of affection are introduced into the mind. Some wholly by the senses, some by reflection, inquiry, comparing things, and forming general notions of them. What is imported in the love of wisdom is—1. A high esteem of its superior excellency as the result of mature consideration. 2. That we should desire it above all things. This Solomon proposeth as a qualification and means of attaining wisdom. 3. Love naturally sheweth itself in the complacency which the mind taketh in the enjoyment of, or even in meditating upon, the beloved objects. II. HOW IT CONTRIBUTETH TO OUR OBTAINING WISDOM. 1. In ordinary human affairs we see that desire putteth men upon that labour and diligence which are the ordinary means of success. 2. The love of wisdom is a disposition highly pleasing to God, and to it He hath made gracious promises. We must conceive of the Supreme Being as a lover of virtue and goodness, of everything which is truly amiable on the account of moral excellence; and if it be so, He hath complacency in those of mankind whose affections are placed on the same thing which is His delight. We have, therefore, the greatest encouragements and advantages for attaining to wisdom, and we ought to use all diligence in humble and affectionate concurrence with Him who worketh in us. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *God loves those that love Him:*—I. WHAT KIND OF LOVE GOD EXERCISES TOWARDS THEM THAT LOVE HIM. There is the love of benevolence and the love of complacency. These two kinds of love are of the same nature, but distinguished by the objects upon which they terminate. The love of benevolence terminates upon recipient being, and extends to all sensitive natures, whether rational or irrational, whether they have a good, or bad, or no moral character. God desires and regards the good of all His creatures, from the highest angel to the lowest insect. The love of complacency is wholly confined to moral beings who are possessed of moral excellence. Nothing but virtue, or goodness, or real holiness is the object of God's complacency. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN MEN'S LOVING GOD? 1. Some true knowledge of His moral character. 2. True love to God implies esteem as well as knowledge. Esteem always arises from a conviction of moral excellence in the person or being esteemed. All men have a moral discernment of moral objects. Sinners cannot contemplate the infinite greatness and goodness of God without discerning His infinite worthiness to be loved. 3. Their loving God truly implies a supreme complacency in His moral character. In the exercise of true love to any object there is a pleasure taken in the object itself. When men truly love God they take pleasure in every part of His moral character. III. WHY DOES GOD ONLY LOVE SUCH AS FIRST LOVE HIM? Before they first love Him they are not lovely. Their hearts are full of evil, and entirely opposed to all that is good. They are under the dominion of selfishness, which is total enmity to all holiness. But there is something in God which renders Him lovely and glorious before He loves sinners; and therefore they can love Him before He loves them. Improvement: 1. If God does not love sinners before they first love Him, then it is a point of more importance in preaching the gospel to make them sensible that He hates them than that

He loves them. 2. Then the first exercise of love to Him must be before they know that He loves them. 3. Then they must love Him, while they know that He hates them, and is disposed to punish them for ever. 4. Then sinners are naturally as unwilling to embrace the gospel as to obey the law. 5. If God love those who first love Him, then He is willing to receive them into His favour upon the most gracious and condescending terms. 6. If God does not love sinners before they love Him, then they have no right to desire or pray that He would become reconciled to them while they continue to hate and oppose Him. 7. If God loves sinners as soon as they love Him, then, if they properly seek Him, they shall certainly find Him. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *Love returned*:—These words do not set forth either—1. That Christ's love is produced by ours. Its source is Himself. 2. Or that Christ's love is since ours. It is eternal. 3. Or that Christ's love is dependent on ours. Unchangeable. 4. Or that Christ's love is only for those who love Him. He gave the greatest proof of it while we were enemies. I. THOSE WHO RETURN CHRIST'S LOVE HAVE THE EVIDENCE OF HIS LOVE TO THEM. II. THOSE WHO RETURN CHRIST'S LOVE RECEIVE SPECIAL MANIFESTATIONS OF GRACE FROM HIM. Answered prayers, the Spirit's comfort, success in labour, joys of communion. III. THOSE WHO RETURN CHRIST'S LOVE HAVE THE POSITION AND TITLE OF HIS LOVED ONES. Brethren, friends, sons of God. IV. THOSE WHO RETURN CHRIST'S LOVE GIVE HIM SPECIAL GLADNESS. (*R. A. Griffin.*) *And those that seek Me early shall find Me.*—*Diligence in seeking wisdom always successful*:—The enjoyments of life are dispensed by the indiscriminating hand of Providence, and often in as large a measure to the unthankful and evil as to the good and virtuous. But wisdom is of a peculiar nature, and it doth not prevent any qualifying dispositions and endeavours in those who obtain it. The foundation of it is laid in the faculties of the mind. Nothing can sufficiently prove the sincerity of our professed affection to wisdom but that seeking it early which is recommended in this text. I. EXPLAIN SEEKING WISDOM EARLY. It means this, that it has the chief room in our cares and application. That which is highest in our esteem, most earnestly desired and delighted in, will naturally engage our first concern and endeavours, while matters of an inferior consideration are justly postponed. 1. If we would seek wisdom it must be by the constant use of the proper means in order to our obtaining it. 2. Diligence, or "seeking early," importeth using the best means frequently, and with spirit and vigour. II. SHOW THE ADVANTAGE OF IT. We have assurance of success. The text contains an express promise in the name of wisdom. 1. Diligence importeth such dispositions of mind as must please the Supreme Being. 2. Diligence in seeking wisdom or religion is really practising it. Commend the importance of seeking wisdom and religion in the beginning of every day, and in youth-time, which is the morning of life. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *Early seekers of Christ directed and encouraged*:—I. WHAT IT IS TO SEEK CHRIST EARLY. The expression is sometimes used for the duty of prayer, sometimes for the whole of religion. To seek Christ is to seek the true knowledge of Christ, and a saving interest in Him. It is to seek that He may be all that to us, and that we may be all that to Him, for which He is made known and proposed in the gospel. To seek early signifies carefully, earnestly, diligently. 1. We are to seek early with respect to the time of life, or in the younger part of our days. The greatest and most important concern of all others is not to be put off to the busy time of life, that is incumbered with the cares and hurries of this world; nor to old age, that is enfeebled by decays and loaded with infirmities. It is never too soon to seek after Christ, but it may be too late. 2. We are to seek Him early with respect to the day of grace, or to our opportunities of seeking Him. Whenever God calls us by His Word or providence, we should be early and speedy in attending to those calls. 3. It is to seek Him early with respect to all other things, or above and before all thing else. This relates to the earnestness and fervour with which He is to be sought in the younger part of our days. It is to seek Him with the whole heart. II. WHAT PECULIAR ENCOURAGEMENTS THERE ARE TO SUCH AS SEEK CHRIST EARLY. 1. Early seeking is most pleasing to Him. 2. It is the ordinary course of Divine grace to be found of early seekers. 3. Such have fewer obstructions in seeking. 4. There are peculiar promises to such. (*J. Guyse, D.D.*) *The holy quest*:—The legend of the "Holy Grail" tells us that Joseph of Arimathea came into possession of the dish from which the Saviour ate, or, according to another version, the cup from which He drank, when He celebrated the last Passover in the upper room with His apostles. When Joseph stood at the Cross, some of the blood which came from the wounds of Christ fell into this vessel, and Joseph ever after-

wards carried about this relic with him in all his wanderings, until at length he came to England. The very presence of this sacred vessel had a mystic influence: miraculous cures were effected by it. But at length, in consequence of the wickedness of the land, this sacred vessel was no longer permitted to remain visible amongst men. What could be a worthier task of Christian knighthood than to go in search of it? Man is, by the very constitution of his nature, a seeker. For wise and good reasons God has made us creatures of desire. It is of the utmost importance that this seeking instinct of our nature should be wisely directed. This Book of Proverbs speaks to you of a treasure which is worthy of your pursuit, and which is the most valuable of all treasures. I. THIS WISDOM IS A HIDDEN TREASURE. Never be led astray by that lie of the devil, that those things which can be seen are the most real and substantial. It is a delusion which is the parent of all ignoble life. The existence of God is the greatest reality of all, and yet your eye cannot see God. You cannot see your mother's love. II. THIS WISDOM IS A SACRED TREASURE. The grail was called the holy grail because it had sacred associations. God's own wisdom is that which we are invited to share. By wisdom is not meant mere knowledge, but that heavenly yet practical wisdom which has to do with the most sacred region of our being—the conscience, the affections, the will—and which enables a man to walk through life in a right and wise direction, and in a spirit sympathetic with the mind of God. No man can be said to live wisely who is living out of harmony with God's own purpose concerning him. True wisdom enables us to make a wise use of all earthly knowledge, but it is itself a heavenly and sacred treasure. III. THIS WISDOM IS A PRICELESS TREASURE. Wisdom may sometimes put a man in the way of obtaining wealth; but no amount of wealth can ever buy wisdom. The true wisdom will lead you into the paths of duty, honour, and integrity. No amount of wealth can by any possibility be a compensation for the lack of the priceless treasure. IV. THIS WISDOM IS A LIFE-GIVING TREASURE. 1. It is a healing influence. 2. A nourishing influence. 3. A life-renewing influence. V. THIS WISDOM IS A TREASURE WHICH MAY BE FOUND BY EVERY EARNEST SEEKER. In the way of—1. Reverence. 2. Prayer. 3. Courage. 4. Purity. I have said that man is born a seeker. It is also true that the elements of heroism lie embedded in the very constitution of our nature. There is plenty of room for Christian knighthood yet—for true chivalry of heart and life. Christ is the Divine Wisdom incarnate—the Word of God in human nature. Then seek Christ. (*T. Campbell Finlayson.*) *Advantages of seeking God early:*—The favour of the Almighty has always been bestowed upon such as remember Him in the days of their youth. See the cases of Joseph, Samuel, Solomon, Josiah, Hannah, Ruth, Timothy, &c. 1. There is an incalculable advantage in beginning in season a work which we know to be long and difficult. 2. Another advantage is the defence which is thus set up against the encroachments of vice. Youth is the season of warm and generous affections: the time when inexperience entices into a thousand snares; the season for active exertion. In youth, we say, the future hinges on the present. If the thoughts and feelings are pure, the soul will be bright with happiness. 3. Another advantage is the promotion of happiness in the family circle, and the beneficent influence thus exerted upon companions and friends. 4. Another advantage is the indescribable satisfaction which is afforded to parents and friends. 5. Another advantage is the ready access which it affords to the throne of grace. 6. Another is that we are thus prepared to meet with a smile the dark frowns of adversity. 7. There is every encouragement for seeking early after God, because we are thus enabled to await, with calm and holy resignation, the coming of death. (*John N. Norton.*) *Seeking God early:*—The Hebrew word used denotes seeking at the dawn or beginning of a day. From the words "I love them that love Me" it might be inferred that man must love God as a preliminary or condition to God's loving man. The truth, however, is, that God's love of man must in every case precede man's love to God, and be its chief producing cause. "We love Him because He first loved us." There is no natural power in men of loving God. No one of us will love God because everything around proves that God loves him. Our love to God is nothing else but the reflection of God's love to us. What produces love to God? You cannot make yourselves love God. It is God alone who can make you love God. When we answer to His love, becoming new creatures through the motions of His Spirit, then, as though He had not loved us before, so endearing is the relationship into which we are brought, that He says "I love them that love Me." If we cannot make ourselves love God, we may think over the proofs of His love, we may look at His

picture, read over His letters, and so put ourselves in the way of receiving those influences which can alone change the heart. From the words "Those that seek Me early shall find Me" we need not argue that if He has not been sought early it is in vain to seek Him late. What are the motives which should conspire to urge the young to an immediate attention to the things which belong unto their peace? 1. The life of the young is as uncertain as that of the old. Health and strength are no security against the speedy approaches of death. Now is the only moment of which you are sure. 2. They will have much greater difficulty in their seeking who fail to seek early. Many suppose that one time will be as fitting as another, late as early, for seeking the Lord. They think that, if they live, repentance will be as much within their power twenty or thirty years hence as it is now. But this is a supposition for which there is no warrant. An old writer says, "God has, indeed, promised that He will at all times give pardon to the penitent, but I do not find that He has promised that He will, at all times, give penitence to the sinful." By continuing in sin habits are formed which will strengthen into task-masters, and which, when men grow old, will be well-nigh irresistible. Very small is the likelihood of producing any moral impression on those who have grown old in forgetfulness of God. We know no so unpromising a subject of moral attack as an aged sinner, always supposing him to have heard the gospel in his youth. Then give God the prime of your strength, the flower of your days, the vigour of your intellect, the ardency of your affections. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *On the advantage of early piety* :—That the religion of Christ is, beyond all others, calculated to produce private and public felicity no man who is acquainted with that religion can doubt. 1. Those who enjoy the singular benefit of a pious education have the greatest probability of success and perseverance in their course. Of two travellers who have the same journey to go, he is much more likely to accomplish it who, rising betimes in the morning, sets out in all the liveliness and vigour of his strength than he who drowsily sleeps till noon and in the heat and toil of the day can scarce drag his feeble feet along. Good principles and habits, early imbibed and formed, are of such power that they will scarcely permit a wide deviation from right. 2. As no good either is or can be perfected in the human mind without almighty grace, so we have the most solid assurance of that Divine assistance when, in our early days, we carefully cherish the influences of God's Holy Spirit. Our text is not only a promise, it is the most condescending call from the Lord of wisdom, inviting us to His love. Love begets love. Our love to Him shall be repaid by His love to us. 3. Hence arise many striking advantages. The first tincture is thus given to the mind, the first bias to the affections; thereby right habits and right principles get the first possession and preserve the inclination and practice from those warping and destructive customs and opinions which it is difficult to bend again and reduce to their original and necessary straightness. We all know how strong are the prepossessions and prejudices of education—ill prepossessions and unhappy prejudices—and we may be perfectly satisfied that good prepossessions and prejudices are equally prevalent and powerful. "The cask long retains the smell of the liquor with which it was first seasoned" (*Horace*). How difficult it is to gain the superiority over habits and customs, even in the most trifling matters, no man is ignorant; but to subdue habits which have long lived with us, and gained our approbation—habits of vice, to which sensual affections have annexed pleasure in the gratification; totally to alter our conduct, to pluck out the right eye of a darling lust, to cut off the right hand of a profitable sin—oh, how arduous, how painful! Here, then, we discern the unspeakable advantage of early good habits and principles, which, preserving us in the road of duty, secure us from this most difficult, if not, in some cases, impossible task, of correcting vicious habits, and amending corrupted customs and notions, which, through long possession, become intimate to men almost as themselves. And the early dedication of ourselves to God will be found not less comfortable than advantageous. It will teach you content in every station, will enable you to sail through life with as much ease and serenity as the unavoidable difficulties of this transitory state will permit; will give to your mind the purest pleasures and most satisfactory enjoyments; will make you a comfort to yourself, a blessing to your friends, and an ornament to society. (*W. Dodd, LL.D.*) *Early piety* :—1. Men have souls and minds capable of being very good or very bad, of enjoying much and suffering much. It is important that a right direction be given early in life to man's whole nature. This can be secured in no way but by living, hearty piety. 2. Early piety will have a good effect in directing us to a

right calling in life, and to a choice of suitable companions and associates. 3. Early piety alone can surely protect us from dashing on those rocks where so many have made shipwreck, both for this world and the next. 4. If we do not become pious in youth it is very uncertain whether we ever shall become so at all. When men grow old their hearts become harder, their wills more stubborn, and their sound conversion less probable. And a large number of the human race die before the period of youth has passed. 5. Should you live through youth, how can you bear the heavy burdens of middle life without the grace of God? If one comes to old age, with all its infirmities, and has not the grace of God in him, how sad his condition, how cheerless his prospects! Application: 1. Are you young? Be not wise in your own conceit. Live by faith on the Son of God. 2. Are you middle-aged? Is the burden of cares heavy? Cast it upon the Lord. Trust in the Lord and do good. Glorify Christ in your body and spirit, which are His. 3. Are you aged? Give yourself much to devotion. Set an example of sweet submission to the will of God. The nearer you draw to heaven, the more let its light and peace shine in your face, cheer your heart, and make your life a blessing to others. (*W. S. Plumer, D.D.*)

*Seeking Christ early:—I. CONSIDER WHAT IT IS TO SEEK CHRIST EARLY. To seek Christ is to seek the true knowledge of Him, and a saving interest in Him. As it relates to the act of seeking Him, it is to attend upon all the means of grace with seriousness, faith, hope, love, and delight. We are to seek early. With respect to all other things, or before and above all things else. This relates to the earnestness and fervour with which He is to be sought. We are to seek Him with the whole heart. II. CONSIDER WHAT SECULAR ENCOURAGEMENTS THERE ARE TO SUCH AS SEEK CHRIST EARLY THAT THEY SHALL FIND HIM. 1. Early seeking is most pleasing to Him. 2. It is the ordinary course of Divine grace to be found of early seekers. 3. Early seekers have fewer obstructions to their seeking and finding Christ than others have. 4. There are peculiar promises made to early seekers. (*T. Hannam.*)*

*Seeking the Lord:—In seeking the Lord—I. KEEP TWO THINGS PERPETUALLY IN VIEW—HIS TRUTH AND THE INFLUENCES OF HIS HOLY SPIRIT. Without His truth we can have no rule, and without the influences of His Holy Spirit we can have no disposition to prize the right rule: both are absolutely necessary. II. Under the influence of the Divine Spirit we shall invariably SEEK GOD AS A GOD OF MERCY. III. AS A GOD OF PEACE. IV. AS A KING. V. AS A GUIDE. VI. AS A PORTION. Now let me apply my subject. 1. There are some of you who do not seek the Lord—you can live without Him perfectly well. 2. There are others who seek the Lord, and perhaps you wonder why you do not find Him. Now, examine yourselves; is there not a great deal of hypocrisy, of deceit, in you? 3. There are others who seek Him, and seek Him honestly, and who think they do not find Him, when in reality they do find Him. They do not find Him in the consolation which they seem to need; but they find Him in principle—they find Him in driving guilt from the conscience, they find Him in enabling them to triumph over the tyranny of sin. 4. There are others who rejoice in the God of their salvation, who can say, "I know that I have sought and found the Lord; my Saviour is in me the hope of glory. I cannot but rejoice in Him at the present moment." Rejoice with trembling. Remember, you have many and mighty enemies within and without. (*W. Howells.*)*

Early seeking of Christ encouraged:—I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN SEEKING THE LORD JESUS? 1. A decided conviction of the utter insufficiency of every other object for our happiness and salvation. 2. A decided persuasion that in Christ Jesus every blessing that the soul requires is to be found. 3. A strong desire to obtain an interest in Christ. 4. Persevering efforts in the use of all appointed means to obtain this object. II. WHAT IT IS TO FIND CHRIST, AND THE HAPPINESS THAT RESULTS FROM IT. 1. The expression, finding Christ—(1) Is figurative, and may be considered as intimating their obtaining a saving discovery of His character. (2) May intimate also their forming a saving connection with Christ. (3) Suggests their obtaining all the blessings of salvation. 2. The happiness that finding Christ yields. (1) They that find Christ obtain deliverance from the worst evils—horror of conscience, burden of guilt, dread of Jehovah's wrath, tyranny of evil passions, thralldom of Satan. (2) They obtain the most valuable advantages. They obtain an interest in the favour of that God who has every blessing at His disposal; the graces which beautify the character, and give peace and joy to the soul in their exercise; an illumination which solves their doubts, scatters their fears, and opens before them scenes glowing with the splendour of eternal day. The heart now finds an object which can gratify its amplest wishes, and may rejoice that these advantages perish

not in the using, and lie secure beyond the reach of accident. (3) They cherish the most blessed hopes with regard to the future. III. THOSE THAT SEEK CHRIST EARLY HAVE THE STRONGEST REASON TO EXPECT SUCCESS. 1. The Redeemer takes peculiar delight in the movements of early piety. These, in an especial manner, honour His supreme excellence. 2. The young are likely to seek Him with undivided hearts, and from affectionate choice. 3. The young have peculiar reason to expect the aids of the Spirit in seeking Christ. 4. The language of the text suggests that those who do not seek the Lord Jesus in their youth have much reason to fear that they shall never find Him. Conclusion: 1. Let me beseech the young to seek the Lord while He may be found. 2. I exhort those who have sought the Saviour early to maintain their earnestness in religion. 3. Let those who are in advanced life consider their ways and be wise. (*H. Belfrage.*) *Seekers who do not seek in vain*:—All the people in the world are seekers, only some people spend their time in seeking for silly and useless things. A king that I have heard of, instead of ruling his people properly, neglected his duties, and spent his time in going from kingdom to kingdom seeking for a mouse with pink eyes. What a waste of time for such a man! Those who are really learned have gathered their wisdom by being ready to learn. I. THOSE WHO BEGIN TO SEEK GOD EARLY HAVE LONGER TIME IN WHICH TO LEARN ABOUT HIM. People who study music after they have grown up seldom become good players or singers; nor do I believe that any one ever really masters grammar who does not begin to study it thoroughly at an early age. Begin therefore at once to learn, for you have lost already more time than you can well spare. II. BEGIN EARLY, BECAUSE YOU WILL HAVE LESS TO UNLEARN. Socrates, a wise man, charged one of his disciples double fees because, he said, he not only had to teach him how to speak, but also how to hold his tongue. A blacksmith could never become a painter, at least not very readily, for he would have to unlearn so much. If you fill your mind with foolish ideas, a vast amount of time will be required to get rid of these follies before you can be instructed in wisdom. III. I think, too, THAT YOU WILL BE MORE ARDENT AND EAGER IN THE PURSUIT OF WISDOM if you begin young, and you will find that history confirms the truth of my opinion. You will not be so readily discouraged, and will more easily master your difficulties than older people can. Little children-students, we are here assured, shall not seek in vain, but they will be required to take pains. Columbus somehow got the idea that America existed, and he went to find the great unknown land. Day after day he sailed on without seeing it, but he one day spied some seaweed of a kind different to that known in Europe. This encouraged him to continue his search. So you, too, will sometimes feel inclined to give up in despair, but keep on; it is worth all the trouble you can ever expend upon it to become wise. And what joy it will impart to you when at length you see what you desire! (*N. Wiseman.*) *Seek Jesus early*:—Our business is to seek Jesus early in life. Happy are the young whose morning is spent with Jesus! It is never too soon to seek the Lord Jesus. Early seekers make certain finders. We should seek Him early by diligence. Thriving tradesmen are early risers, and thriving saints seek Jesus eagerly. Those who find Jesus to their enrichment give their hearts to seeking Him. We must seek Him first, and thus earliest. Above all things Jesus. Jesus first, and nothing else even as a bad second. The blessing is, that He will be found. He reveals Himself more and more clearly to our search. He gives Himself up more fully to our fellowship. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Seeking Christ in the dawn of life*:—The word "early" is not in the original. The passage therefore might be read thus—"And those that seek Me shall find Me." Yet we cannot altogether throw out the word "early"; it seems to complete the rhythm. The word "seek" as originally employed is a word which involves the meaning of seeking in the dawn—just as the east is whitening a little, just as the day is being born. Thus we have some claim to the word early. There are men who do not wait until midday in order to resume their journey after they have been benighted; they have, indeed, succumbed to circumstances, saying, "The darkness has overtaken us, and here we must lie"; but the moment there is a streak in the east up they start, the staff is resumed, and the journey is prosecuted with renewed energy. This is the image of the text: They that seek Me in the dawn shall find Me; they that seek Me at daybreak; they that come after Me ere the dew be risen shall find Me, and we shall have a long morning talk together: when the soul is young, when the life is free, when the heart is unsophisticated, they that seek Me in the dawn shall find Me, for I have been waiting for them, yea, standing by them whilst they were sleeping, and half-hoping that the moment they open their eyes they would see Me, and exclaim,

"Blessed Spirit, take charge of my poor, young, little, frail life all the day, and tell me what I ought to do." Fool is he who begins the day prayerlessly, who takes his own life into his own hand: verily in doing so he puts his money into bags with holes in them, and at night he shall have nothing. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. Riches and honour are with Me; yea, durable riches and righteousness.—*On gaining and using riches:*—Whatever is true and substantial happiness even in this life has a necessary dependence upon morality and religion. Wealth and riches are but heavy encumbrances and unprofitable lumber if they are not made use of to reward the good, to excite the diligent, and to relieve the oppressed. But that religion should be the path that leads to wealth and substance, and that to be good is the way to become rich, seems to be a paradox contrary to the sentiments of mankind. Piety may indeed comfort us in our wants, and support us in our afflictions; but that it should be the best factor to gain them and store them up is an assertion so opposite to the persuasion of men that it seems like the wild affirmation of one who would defend a novelty. I. PIETY IS THE MOST EFFECTUAL MEANS TO OBTAIN RICHES. 1. Riches are the gift of God, not the goods of fortune. If there is a wise and provident Governor of the world, the success of all human enterprises depends upon His disposition of things. If the men of virtue and piety are the favourites of the Almighty, they may expect bounties as the signs of His love; if they be His faithful servants, as rewards of their fidelity. 2. See what piety is, examine it in itself and in its consequences, and we shall find it to be naturally productive of riches and plenty. Piety is the habitual practice of moral and Divine virtues, each one of which has a tendency to enrich its followers, *e.g.*, industry, temperance, humility, brotherly love, liberality, and charity. 3. Credit and reputation in the world have a very great dependence upon honesty and an upright life, and they are things absolutely necessary for the promotion of our health and worldly interest. The only solid foundation of a good name is piety and virtue. 4. Piety and virtue direct to the use of those methods which are honest and lawful. The most honest means are always the sweetest. II. THE SECURING OF RICHES OR MAKING THEM DURABLE. This may be considered in a double respect—1. In relation to ourselves. 2. In relation to posterity. Whatever is got by means that are repugnant to piety is not to be kept, but must be parted with. All vices have a natural tendency to impoverish mankind. It is well to note that the efficacy of piety is not bounded here; it reaches beyond the grave, and entails its blessings on future generations. The generation of the faithful shall be blessed. (*William Hayley, M.A.*)

Ver. 20. I lead in the way of righteousness.—*Substance the inheritance of the saints:*—I. JESUS LEADS IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—1. By leading them into His holy, strict, and condemning law. 2. By implanting sincerity and uprightness. II. JESUS LEADS IN THE MIDST OF THE PATHS OF JUDGMENT. These paths of judgment are when He, with His holy eye, scrutinises the heart and brings to light its secret workings. He leads by setting up a court of judicature in the heart, arraigning the soul at its bar; not with vengeance, as punishing a criminal, but as a parent, after the child has been playing truant all day. III. JESUS CAUSES THE SOUL TO INHERIT SUBSTANCE. Something solid, weighty, powerful, real, and eternal. Power and life and feeling, and the blessed kingdom of God set up with authority in the soul. A substantial religion—something that is dropped into the soul from His own blessed self, something that comes out of Himself, and out of the fulness of His own loving heart, to make them rejoice and be glad. (*J. C. Philpot.*) **In the midst of the paths of judgment.**—*The golden mean:*—In this country, if you walk in the middle of the street in the town, or in the middle of the road in the country, you are exposed to danger from horses and vehicles, for which that part of the road was reserved, and therefore side-paths and pavements have been provided, where you can take refuge from the traffic. It is different in the East. There the roads are so badly made, and so little frequented, that you are always safest in the middle. There is a rock, perhaps, on this side, and a precipice or a ditch on that, and the edges of the road are always so rugged and uneven that only the well-worn track in the middle is available for easy travelling. And from this condition of Eastern roads has arisen the moral lesson that the middle of the path of conduct is the safest and the best. The sentiment may be exemplified in everything moral and religious. The Greeks of old always spoke of the golden mean between two extremes, and were fond of proving that truth and safety always lay in

the middle. The wise man speaks of the paths of judgment. These paths are on either side of the way of righteousness, which is the middle; and they are called paths of judgment because, if you stray into them off the strait and narrow way of righteousness, you will meet with dangers and evils that will assuredly punish you. The virtues that yield the blessings of life are in the middle, between the vices that wreck and blight your life. A little too much on the one side or the other makes all the difference in the world; and so close to each other do the evils you have to avoid come, that narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. The side-path may, therefore, be smooth and pleasant, but it leads to danger. The middle of the road may be rough and difficult, but it is safe—the way of righteousness, between the paths of judgment. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. That I may cause them that love Me to inherit substance.—*Man's enrichment by God*.—I. LOVE—THE LOVE OF GOD AS THE SOURCE OF EVERY BLESSING. II. THE LOVE OF CREATED BEING IS EXCITED BY SOME GOOD, REAL OR IMAGINARY, IN THE OBJECT BELOVED. III. MAN'S INDIVIDUAL SINS, WANTS, AND NECESSITIES. IV. OBSERVE THE WAY IN WHICH MAN IS TO BECOME RICH. God gives Himself—involving every good. V. GOD HIMSELF IS TO BE THE WEALTH OF HIS FAMILY FOR EVERMORE. (*W. Howells.*) *Real substance in spiritual things*.—This is among the golden sayings of the book. In the text is an encouragement to religion drawn from the incomparable benefit of it. "They that love Me shall not be losers by Me." The Hebrew word for substance means that which is: that which hath a firm and solid consistency. 1. By substance may be meant Christ. He must needs be substance who gives being and substance to everything. 2. By substance is meant the grace of the Spirit. That must needs be substance which partakes of the fulness of God. 3. By substance is meant salvation, expressly called substance (Heb. x. 34). I. THE QUALIFICATION OF THE PERSONS. "Those that love Me." 1. The affection: Love. Love doth mellow and perfume holy duties. Love is that which the Lord is most delighted with. 2. The object of love: Christ. Did men know Christ, it were impossible to keep them off from loving Him. II. THE SPECIFICATION OF THE PRIVILEGE. Why is grace called substance? 1. For its preciousness. 2. For its suitableness. 3. For its needfulness. 4. For its satisfyingness. 5. For its certainty. 6. For its durableness. Substance signifies something that runs parallel with eternity. That spiritual things must needs have a real being and substance in them appears by two convincing arguments. (1) Because God, who is the original pattern of truth, hath asserted it. (2) This is most consistent with the rational nature. Learn—1. The incomparable excellence of grace. 2. See the difference between the things of God and the things of the world. 3. See the egregious folly of those who mind things of less moment, but do not look after substance (Isa. lv. 2). Why do not men labour more after spiritual substance? Answer: 1. Ignorance. 2. Presumption. If we have this spiritual substance, we can remember a time when we wanted it. We know how we came by it. We highly prize it. (*T. Watson.*)

Vers. 22–36. The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His way.—*Wisdom the first creation of God*.—Here is the noble idea which overturns at a touch all mythological speculations about the origin of things—an idea which is in deep harmony with all the best knowledge of our time—that there is nothing fortuitous in the creation of the world; the Creator is not a blind Force, but an intelligent Being whose first creation is wisdom. He is the origin of a law by which He means to bind Himself; arbitrariness finds no place in His counsels; accident has no part in His works; in wisdom hath He formed them all. Here is a clear recognition of the principle that God's law is a law also to Himself, and that His law is wisdom. He creates the world as an outcome of His own wise and holy design, so that "nothing walks with aimless feet." It is on this theological conception that the possibility of science depends. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *The autobiography of Wisdom*.—I. AS HAVING EXISTED BEFORE ALL TIME. II. AS HAVING BEEN PRESENT AT THE CREATION. III. AS HAVING BEEN IN EXTERNAL ASSOCIATION WITH THE CREATOR. IV. AS HAVING FELT BEFORE ALL WORLDS A DEEP INTEREST IN MAN. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. I was set up from everlasting.—*Christ set up from everlasting*.—*Doctrine*: That as Christ is the everlasting God, so, from all eternity, He was foreordained and set up for the great service of man's redemption. I. To PROVE

THAT CHRIST IS THE EVERLASTING GOD. 1. That He existed before the incarnation is evident from the appearance He made to our first parents in paradise. 2. We find His existence and agency in the production of all created beings. 3. Run up to the endless ages before the creation of the world, and we find Him existing or ever the earth was. II. WHAT IS IMPORTED IN HIS BEING SET UP FROM EVERLASTING. 1. It supposes the council of peace, or an eternal transaction between the Father and the Son concerning the redemption of lost sinners. 2. It implies the infinite complacency that the Father and Son had in each other from all eternity. 3. It implies a Divine ordination and decree, whereby He was from eternity elected into the great service of man's redemption. 4. It implies that, in consequence of the decree, He was called of God to undertake the work of redemption. 5. It implies His own voluntary consent to, and complacency with, His Father's call. He was actually set up in time. (1) His first appearance was in the promise made to our first parents. (2) Set up typically under the Old Testament. (3) Set up prophetically. (4) Personally and actually, in His incarnation, obedience, and death. (5) In His resurrection and ascension. (6) Sacramentally, in baptism and the last supper. (7) In conversion. (8) Will be set up at His second coming. III. FOR WHAT ENDS AND PURPOSES CHRIST WAS THUS SET UP. 1. As a sun, to give light to this lower world. 2. As a second Adam, the head of a new covenant of grace and promise. 3. As a repairer of breaches between God and man. IV. THE GROUNDS AND REASONS WHY CHRIST WAS SET UP. 1. Because it was the Father's will and pleasure. 2. Because of the good-will He did bear to man upon earth. 3. Because of His ability for the undertaking. 4. Because He voluntarily offered Himself for the work and service. 5. Because from everlasting God foresaw what a revenue of glory would accrue to the crown of heaven through His mediation. V. APPLICATION OF THE DOCTRINE. See the antiquity and activity of the love of God; the stability and perpetuity of the covenant of grace and of the Church; the reason why all hands should be at work to exalt Him. (*E. Erskine.*)

Ver. 30. And I was dally His delight.—*The happiness of Christ antecedent to His incarnation*:—The delights between the Father and the Son, before His assumption of our nature, were twofold. 1. They delighted in one another without communicating their joys to any other; for no creature did then exist save in the mind of God. 2. They delighted in the salvation of men; in the prospect of that work, though not yet extant. The condition and state of Jesus Christ before His incarnation was a state of the most unspeakable delight in the enjoyment of His Father. Consider this—I. NEGATIVELY. 1. He was not abased to the low estate of a creature. 2. He was not under the law in this estate. 3. He was not liable to any of those sorrowful consequents and attendants of that frail state of humanity which afterwards He assumed with that nature. Unacquainted with griefs. Never pinched with poverty and want. Never underwent reproach and shame. Was never offended with any impure suggestions. Never sensible of tortures and pains. There were no hidings or withdrawals of His Father. No experience of death. II. POSITIVELY. 1. A state of matchless happiness. 2. A state of intimacy, dearness, and oneness with His Father. 3. A state of pure, unmixed, and ravishing delight. III. COMPARATIVELY. 1. Compare it with the delight that some creatures take in each other, and you will soon find that they fall infinitely short of this. 2. Compare it with the delight that God takes in some of His creatures; you will find it to come short of the delight that God takes in Christ. 3. Compare it with the delight that the best of creatures take in God and Christ; how infinitely short it comes of the delight that God takes in Christ! Conclusion: 1. What an astonishing love was this for the Father to give the darling of His soul for poor sinners! 2. Adore the love of Jesus to sinners, that ever He should consent to leave such a bosom. 3. An interest in Jesus Christ is the true way to all spiritual preferment in heaven. 4. Jesus Christ is worthy of all love and delight. 5. It is a grievous thing to see God's dear Son despised, slighted, and rejected by sinners. 6. Let us be ready to forsake and leave all for Christ. (*John Flavel.*) *Christ's eternal felicity*:—I. CHRIST WAS WITH THE FATHER AT THE BEGINNING. This censures the Arians. II. GOD THE FATHER, AS HE DELIGHTED IN CHRIST AT THE BEGINNING, SO HE DOTH ALWAYS. 1. Because He is His Son. 2. Because He never offended Him. 3. Because He is always ready to please His Father. III. CHRIST REJOICED IN GOD THE FATHER FROM THE BEGINNING, AND DOES SO ALWAYS. Some read, "I rejoice, or sport, always before Him." (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Rejoicing always before Him.—Eternal Wisdom*

rejoicing in the events to be revealed.—If we contemplate the character of Divine Wisdom as directed to earth, dwelling amongst men, anticipating the concerns and circumstances and history of this human world, we shall—1. Be led to perceive an importance attaching to all the ramifications of that history, to all its epochs and all its events. 2. In addition to this we shall be led to depend, with a degree of delight and joy, on all the arrangements and developments of this Wisdom in relation to our circumstances. 3. And we shall perceive the impropriety of our murmuring; and that there is the greatest measure of folly, as well as of danger, in allowing ourselves to dispute any part of the Divine proceedings. 4. Such a view will induce us to look with intelligent and instructed minds upon all the things around us, and to observe in the various circumstances which transpire before our view the actual working out of a plan arranged before eternity. 5. We shall regard the great Supreme with deep solicitude, in order that we ourselves may be brought to see the truth and results of all that is around us. 6. We shall anticipate the glory of that scene in its fulness which we now perceive in fragments. Christ looked forward to the production of the world for the sake of the men who would dwell on it. What is more wonderful than the intellectual, physical, moral, and spiritual being, man? Consider the proofs of this anticipation and delight, and the reason whence arises all this delight. (R. S. McAll, LL.D.)

Ver. 31. *Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth.*—*The rejoicing of Wisdom*.—I. WHERE DID THE SON OF GOD BY ANTICIPATION REJOICE? "Habitable part of His earth." "Sons of men." 1. The simple fact in itself. Of all creation this insignificant globe of earth is singled out. And of this globe its habitable part. It is with souls He would have to do. It was the empire of mind upon the earth that He in time expected to assume. This puts an honour and dignity upon our poor human nature which it is impossible fully to estimate. 2. Certain circumstances connected with this fact. What claims had earth's inhabitants upon His regard? We can think of none. Man is an insignificant being and a sinner. II. WHY DID THE ETERNAL JOY OF THE SON OF GOD CENTRE IN THIS EARTH? This joy could not have arisen from contemplation of our misery, and far less of our guilt. When He cast a glance down to this earth, what did His mind's eye discover in its habitable parts? He saw men ruined, and purposed to save them. His atonement was the chief ground of joy to Himself, because the great occasion of glory to His Father and of good to His people. Lessons—1. Of reproof to careless and Christless sinners. 2. Of consolation to believers. (N. Morren, M.A.) *Christ's joy in the Church before His incarnation*.—Wisdom here is a real, not an allegorical person. It is the Eternal Word. Our Saviour informs us that, as soon as the world was made, the habitable parts of it became the scene and subject of His rejoicing. His delights were with men rather than angels. Yet He knew that the world would be wet with His tears and stained with His blood. Why, then, did He rejoice in the human inhabitants of the earth? It could not be on account of man's intellectual or moral excellency. It must be because in the world the plan of redemption was to be executed, and because men were the objects of it. Our Redeemer rejoiced in the world because—I. IT WAS DESTINED TO BE THE PLACE IN WHICH HE SHOULD PERFORM THE MOST WONDERFUL OF HIS WORKS. There He would obtain His greatest victory, make the most glorious display of His moral perfections, and in the most signal manner glorify the Father. II. BECAUSE THE HABITABLE PARTS OF THE EARTH WERE THE DESTINED RESIDENCE OF HIS THEN FUTURE CHURCH. They are all destined to be filled with His disciples. Everywhere Churches are to be established. III. OUR REDEEMER'S CHIEF DELIGHTS AND PLEASURES WERE WITH MEN. 1. Because He intended Himself to become a man. 2. To many the Divine Redeemer was to become still more nearly related. As His Church. 3. His delights partly lay in its being more blessed to give than to receive. How ungrateful and inexcusable does the treatment which Christ has received from men appear when viewed in the light of this subject! (E. Payson, D.D.) *The voice of God's eternal Wisdom*.—I. FROM THE BEGINNING THE WELFARE OF MAN ENGAGED THE COMPLACENT REGARD OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR. 1. He represents Himself here as deriving delight from the spectacle even of the material creation, because it was subservient to man. He looked on material objects as visible realisations of eternal types. On comparing them with the originals in His own infinite mind He beheld the perfect resemblance, and was satisfied. He beheld them in their prospective application, serving as indexes or intimations of His infinite greatness to myriads of minds which He purposed to create. He

looked on these objects as the first in an endless series yet to come. In His first acts of creation the Great Architect was laying the foundation of an all-comprehending and eternal temple. And it was all present in His mind, and He rejoiced in the glorious prospect. 2. There was the happiness of prospectively beholding the activity, enlargement, and progress of the whole system of creation and providence. The prospect of this development of His great plan afforded Him profound satisfaction. This is evident because He has sought at times to throw His Church into an ecstasy of delight by affording them glimpses of its onward course; for the disclosures of prophecy are such glimpses. 3. There was the happiness of prospectively beholding the effects arising from His gratuitous interposition for human salvation. 4. Then there was the happiness derivable from knowing that, important as the recovery of man is, in attaining it He should be attaining an end greater still—attaining the greatest of all ends—the manifestation of the Divine glory. II. ALL THE MEDIATOR'S COMMUNICATIONS AND INTERCOURSE WITH US ARE MADE TO HARMONISE WITH OUR WELFARE ALSO. Tell us the distinguishing wants of human nature, and we will tell you the distinguishing excellences of Divine revelation. 1. From their eager inquiries and their signs of reflection you infer that they are intelligent beings, and from other signs you infer that the subjects which most deeply interest them are those which refer to their origin, their character, and their relation to the invisible and the future. Man's solution of these problems is puerile, contradictory, and absurd. What is the Divine explanation of the mystery? 2. Man is manifestly a sufferer. Sorrow has but two places of refuge—the sanctuary and the grave. 3. Man is a personally sinful being. The Mediator has made special provision for the necessities thus arising. The vicarious sacrifice of Christ, while providing a complete satisfaction for human guilt, provides that which we equally require—means for the renovation of our sinful nature and motives to a constant progress in holiness. So wonderfully adapted to the susceptibilities, so exquisitely adjusted to all the springs of our nature is the Cross of Christ, that in the hand of the Spirit it relieves our apprehensions, while it quickens our sensibility—gives peace to the conscience while it increases its activity and power—inspires hope while it produces humility, by the very magnitude and splendour of the objects which inspire it—demands perfection, by presenting the affections with an object calculated to produce it. 4. But man is not only a rational, suffering, sinful being. He is groaning and travelling together in pain, casting anxious looks on the future, gazing on the distant darkness, invoking the dead. The burden of his great anxiety is this, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Answering that, Jesus is "the Resurrection and the Life." Such are parts of that great system of saving truth by which the Saviour seeks to realise those purposes of mercy toward us, the bare contemplation of which filled Him with delight. III. THE SAVIOUR REJOICES IN SUCH PARTS OF THE EARTH AS ARE SET APART FOR THE DIFFUSION OF HIS TRUTH AND THE PROMOTION OF HIS DESIGNS. Man was to have moved over the face of the earth as amidst the types and symbolic services of a temple, where everything was adapted to remind Him of God. Sin has disturbed this adjustment and thrown it in confusion. If this is to be remedied, some counter-force must be employed. IV. WHAT DOES CHRIST EXPECT FROM A PLACE THUS DISTINGUISHED? 1. He expects you to sympathise with Him in His regard for human happiness. 2. He expects you to aim at results and to look for them. 3. Not only expect the results, but anticipate the consequences of those results. (*J. Harris, D.D.*) And My delights were with the sons of men.—*Christ's delight in the sons of men*:—1. "Rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth." (1) "The habitable parts of His earth" are such places where the gospel comes, bringing the good tidings of Jesus Christ and His salvation for lost sinners. (2) "The habitable part of His earth" is especially intended of such as are, through grace, become "the habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 22, iii. 17; John iv. 13). The Lord Jesus Christ rejoiced in this habitable part of this earth from everlasting, before there was an earth to be inhabited. 2. The delights of Jesus Christ, from all eternity, were "with the sons of men." (1) He knew that by standing as a Surety for His people, and bearing their guilt and punishment, He should also bear away their sins. (2) He knew that in saving His people, through His obedience in life and death, all the Divine perfections would be more remarkably displayed and glorified than in all the other works of God. (3) His delight proceeded from the pleasing prospect that He had of men being united to Himself by faith. (4) He delighted in the prospect of conveying the riches of grace to their souls. (5) He delighted in the prospect of their

sincere services done in faith and love. (6) He delighted in the prospect of His acting towards them, as the Prophet of His Church, to teach them the mind and will of God for their salvation. (7) He delighted in the prospect that He had from everlasting, of His people being all brought home to glory, to be for ever with Him. The greatest honour that Jesus Christ can do to men upon earth is to delight in them. "Such honour have all His saints" (Isa. lxii. 4). This implies—1. His interest in them. 2. His continual remembrance of them. 3. His readiness to bestow His best favours upon them. Did Jesus Christ delight in His people from everlasting; then all the disciples of Christ should delight in Him (1 Pet. ii. 7; Cant. v. 10). (*W. Notcutt.*)

Wisdom resident in the world.—Wisdom rejoices in the habitable parts of the earth, not in the monastic retreats of a dreary desert or wilderness. Wisdom's delights are among the sons of men, not in the midst of books. The inestimable advantages gained in those places, only become wisdom as they are used among men, just as the wheat, growing on some distant prairie, where few eyes ever rest upon its beauties, becomes food only as it reaches the crowded city, where men are longing for it and would die without it. Wisdom is in the world where men are; she delights to be there; we need not leave the world to find her if we will only hear the voice of God just where we are. The sins and failings of men can speak warnings to us; the needs of men can stir our activities; the kindness and goodness of men can point to God's greater love. Everywhere hands point up to God and our true relations to Him, if only we will let Him be as real, as truly personal, as the rest of the world is to us. . . . Wisdom delights in the habitable parts of the earth, and rejoices to be among the sons of men. Can it always be so? How often we tire of the very noise of our fellow-men, and wish to flee afar off and be at rest! Wisdom cannot feel that exhaustion. But how often the most habitable parts of the earth are the very homes of the foolishness of sin! We see their wickedness and foolishness: must not Wisdom itself see it much more? Are the social regulations of our life to-day likely to please the heart of Wisdom and make her long to be among them? How much true wisdom do they cultivate among those who are devoted to them? Wisdom may be in our streets, but it must be as a very sorrowful resident, as she sees soul after soul that she loves lost in the desire of gain, associating with its fellow-man only for selfish purposes. The souls might delight her and make her stay, but would the lives which she saw those souls leading do so? What can we do to make society and life generally worthy of this great presence which is ever in it? No laws, no customs, no institutions that we can establish for business or the State, no prescriptions that we may make for social life, will do the work; for those are impersonal, and what we have seen to be valuable to the world is the personal presence of Wisdom. And that must find its expression in our personal lives. All that makes society attractive or city life prosperous to-day came from God, and in that fact has its power for us. For that reason it cannot be ignored or put out of sight. But why, then, is it so dangerous to us? Because it destroys our sense of personal responsibility, which is the great thing by which we are to show forth the true character of God's wisdom. Be followers of Christ, personal friends of Jesus. Recognise the fact that Christ is in all that is good, and that by being true to Him you cannot possibly get out of the stream of the world's true life. You will have to leave some things that are false, you will have to condemn them by leaving them; but all which truly belongs to men must ultimately be the possession of those who have the Wisdom whose delights are among the sons of men. (*Arthur Brooks.*)

Divine Wisdom.—I. THE JOY OF GOD IN THIS MATERIAL WORLD. The Divine Wisdom approved the result of the Divine power and skill. II. HIS DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN. Humanity has always held a foremost place in the thoughts of God. 1. Man as a creature of God. The noblest work that God has placed upon the earth; he is the crown and glory of this terrestrial creation. 2. Man has sinned. The prescient eye of God from eternity looked upon man, not only as a creature endowed with high capabilities, and as an offender against law and a sufferer because of sin, but He looked upon him as a transgressor redeemed. He looked on men not only in their connection with the first Adam, but also in their connection with the second Adam. He foresaw the success which should crown the mission and sacrifice of His well-beloved Son. (*T. Stephens.*)

On the benevolence of Christ to the human race.—I. OUR BLESSED LORD REJOICED IN THE HABITABLE PART OF THE EARTH BECAUSE HE FORESAW THAT THE PERFECTIONS OF GOD WOULD BE MANIFESTED AND GLORIFIED. The human race appears to have been created for a twofold purpose. 1. To glorify God upon the

earth. 2. That our Lord might defeat the infernal purposes of the malicious spirits, destroy the works of the devil. II. HIS DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN, THAT HE MIGHT MINISTER TO THE COMFORT AND HAPPINESS OF THEIR BODIES. What an amazing constellation of virtues did He exhibit, and how boundless must have been that love which led Him day after day, amidst hunger, and thirst, and fatigue, and suffering, and sorrow, to relieve the wants of the needy and restore to the soundness of health and activity the miserable and forlorn sufferers of calamity and woe! III. HIS DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN, THAT HE MIGHT ENLIGHTEN THEIR MINDS BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT. Many theories have been propounded to solve the mystery of the introduction of moral evil into the world, but no hypothesis is so credible or intelligible as that of the Scripture account of the fall of man. Our blessed Lord interposed on our behalf, and generously undertook to redeem us from the curse of the law and regain that immortal life which we had forfeited by our disobedience. How can we account for such a display of unparalleled benevolence but from His ardent desire to promote the best interests of men? IV. HIS DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN, THAT HE MIGHT SANCTIFY THEIR SOULS AND PREPARE THEM FOR THE ENJOYMENTS OF HEAVEN. We ought to be extremely solicitous for the salvation of our souls, and never dare to imagine that, because Christ has died for our sins, we shall be saved without that holiness of heart and life which are the fruits of the Spirit in all them that believe. (D. Davidson.) *Wisdom's delights with the sons of men*:—In these words are revealed things concerning the personal, substantial, and self-existent Wisdom. I. "MY DELIGHTS WERE WITH THE SONS OF MEN." Wisdom, then, has her delights; and where does she find them? The prime of these delights is that which He finds in Himself. He has complacential delight in Himself, for He only is perfection, independent, and eternal. The communications of His glorious attributes are also His delight. These rest on the sinful sons of men. The words include the idea of dwelling with the sons of men. What led the Saviour to such condescension? It was purely of His tender love towards mankind. Whence originates this love? In His own bosom, and we can say no more and see no farther. II. REJOICING IN THE HABITABLE PARTS OF GOD'S EARTH. The Hebrew is forcible and poetical—"playing or disporting on the orb of God's earth." God formed the earth and the world with wisdom, but also with love, and not only for the benefit, but also for the happiness of His creatures, and with a special view to the pleasure of the sons of men. In Christ, the Wisdom of God, the same wonderful condescension continues still. He adapts Himself to our human conceptions; brings His mysteries near to us in a most gracious manner; and the same graciousness is seen in God's everyday communion with His beloved children. The word "rejoicing" reminds of sweet music, and all the music on earth is made by Christ or for Him. (F. W. Krummacher, D.D.)

Ver. 32. Blessed are they that keep My ways.—*The claims of Divine Wisdom*:—I. THESE ARE VERY SIMPLE. 1. Diligently study its counsels. 2. Constantly obey its precepts. The teachings of Divine Wisdom are not speculative, but regulative. They are maxims to rule the life. II. VERY IMPORTANT. 1. Obedience to them is happiness. 2. To neglect them is ruin. (David Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 33. Hear instruction, and be wise.—*Motives for hearing sermons*:—Contempt of God's Sabbaths and disregard of ministerial instruction are melancholy characteristics of the age in which we live. I. THE TENDENCY OF PREACHING AND HEARING THE WORD TO PROMOTE OUR BEST INTEREST. This tendency is sufficient to enforce the duty recommended in my text. The sacred oracles are profitable. The doctrines revealed in them are not doubtful speculations, or light and trivial matters, but truths of infallible certainty, of the most sublime and excellent nature, and, to us men, of infinite importance. The learned as well as illiterate need to go to church on their own account. None, in this imperfect state, arrive at such extent and exactness of Christian knowledge as to need no further assistance for knowing more. For wise reasons the Bible was not written in a systematic form. In searching the Scriptures we need to use the fittest and most effectual means in our power. What can be better suited to assist us in the attainment of religious knowledge than the discourses of those who have not only made it their chief business to study the sacred oracles, but who, by cultivating their rational powers, have acquired a facility of forming distinct conceptions of things, and of expressing those conceptions with plainness and propriety? And knowledge, however extensive,

if it hath no suitable influence on men's hearts and lives, will profit them nothing. Therefore men need a faithful monitor, to awaken in us a practical sense of danger and of duty. So sensible was Julian the apostate how wise an institution preaching was for promoting the knowledge and practice of religion, that he appointed men to preach moral philosophy, and to harangue, publicly, in defence of heathenism. II. HEARING THE WORD OF GOD IS ENJOINED BY EXPRESS DIVINE AUTHORITY. In the Old Testament dispensation (Deut. xxiv. 8; Eccles. xii. 9-11; Neh. viii. 7-11; Hag. ii. 11; Mal. ii. 7) synagogue worship had to be regularly attended. New Testament injunctions are Eph. iv. 11-13; 1 Tim. iv. 16; 2 Tim. ii. 15, iv. 2; Titus i. 9, ii. 1, 7, 8. III. THE DREADFUL THREATENINGS DENOUNCED AND EXECUTED AGAINST THOSE WHO REFUSE TO HEAR GOD'S WORD. Such as Prov. i. 24-31, xxi. 16, xxviii. 9; Matt. x. 14; Heb. ii. 2, 3, x. 28, 29, xii. 25. On the other hand, God hath promised His special presence and blessing to the faithful preaching, and conscientious hearing of His Word. To support and strengthen our hopes let us review former accomplishments of these exceeding great and precious promises. In how miraculous a manner hath the Word of God often triumphed over the greatest opposition! (*J. Erskine, D.D.*)

Ver. 34. Blessed is the man that heareth Me, watching daily at My gates, waiting at the posts of My doors.—*Attending public instruction recommended:—*

I. THE REASONABLENESS OF ATTENDING ALL THE INSTITUTED MEANS OF OUR INSTRUCTION. If God had never vouchsafed to men a positive revelation, we should have been obliged to feel after virtue if haply we might find it. And it is surprising to what lengths some have arrived without the help of that "grace which bringeth salvation." But when it hath pleased God to erect a kingdom in the world, it is great ingratitude, a heinous contempt of God's authority, an affront to His love, and so must be inexcusable folly so to neglect our own true interest. II. WHAT IS IMPORTED IN HEARING. Scripture represents this as the sum of that duty and respect which God demandeth for Christ who is His Wisdom, and the great revealer of His will to mankind. Whatever is meant by hearing Christ, the Wisdom of the Father, it is enjoined and enforced with all the authority and obligatory power with which any Divine precept can be enforced. Hearing importeth a serious and attentive consideration, and a diligent application of the mind, to understand the important contents of the Divine message. We are to understand by hearing—1. An attentive regard to instruction. The Wisdom of God hath the first right to be heard, and what He prescribeth, to be attended to. 2. Hearing signifies a submissive disposition. To hear is to turn at the reproofs of Wisdom, to tremble at the threatenings of God, to hope in His promises, and practise what He enjoineth. 3. Hearing Wisdom importeth an absolute unreserved obedience. III. THE PROPER DISPOSITIONS OF MIND, AND THE MANNER OF HEARING AND USING ALL MEANS. 1. It importeth a sense of our constant need of instruction, that we may be still making further progress in knowledge and in grace. If this be the temper of our minds, it will incline us to a daily attendance at the gates of Wisdom; that is, a daily use of the appointed means for our increase in knowledge and virtue. 2. A constant care and solicitude that the benefit of them may not be lost; and particularly a strict vigilance over our own spirits and our whole behaviour. 3. Patience, which is signified by waiting, is also needed. Our progress to religious knowledge and virtue is gradual. Patience is the character of a continuance in well-doing, as well as of enduring afflictions. Always endeavour with alacrity and vigour to use the means of our religious instruction and improvement. (*J. Abernethy, M.D.*) *Watchful diligence:—*I. THE WAY TO HAPPINESS IS TO HEARKEN DILIGENTLY TO WISDOM'S WORDS. 1. We cannot of ourselves find out the way to true happiness. 2. No man can show it to us. II. WE MUST NOT ONLY HEAR, BUT WATCH FOR WISDOM. Omit no occasion of learning, and make the best possible use of every occasion. III. WE MUST NOT ONLY WATCH FOR AWHILE, WE MUST WAIT LONG, IF WE WOULD GET WISDOM. Give no place to idleness and slothfulness, lest ye become unteachable, and incapable of wisdom. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *Waiting upon God:—*Profession without principle is worthless. He who is not an every-day Christian is no Christian at all. I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EVERY-DAY CHRISTIAN. They are—1. Hearers. Many hear, and do not hear. Hearing implies profitable hearing. Many do not profit. They come to hear, but not to learn, or to practise. Some come fresh from the cares of the world. Others come with unclean hearts. If you would receive good by attending at the house of God, there must be a desire to profit; and with a lively faith. 2. They

are watchers. This implies frequency, perseverance, self-denial, self-abasement, and a certain degree of anxiety. 3. They "wait at the posts of His doors." That is, attend those places, and frequently attend them, where Christ is expected. II. SUCH A MAN WILL NEVER LOSE HIS REWARD. 1. He finds life. St. John says, "He that hath the Son hath life." Finding Christ is finding life. Finding life implies pardon. With pardon we have peace. 2. The reward consists in the favour of God. This favour is enduring. It supports the sinner in the time of his trouble. Lessons: 1. Though you may be a hearer, a watcher, a waiter upon Christ, you must expect your trials. Do not be surprised either at the number or the degree of your trials. 2. See that you come in the spirit of prayer and of faith. (*H. Montagu Villiers, M.A.*) *Waiting at Wisdom's gates*.—The Bible seldom speaks, and certainly never its deepest, sweetest words, to those who always read it in a hurry. Nature can only tell her secrets to such as will sit still in her sacred temple, till their eyes lose the glare of earthly glory, and their ears are attuned to her voice. And shall revelation do what nature cannot? Never. The man who shall win the blessedness of hearing her must watch daily at her gates, and wait at the posts of her doors. (*F. B. Meyer.*)

Ver. 35. Whoso findeth Me findeth life.—*The Christian life delineated: Christ to be found in the ordinances, with the import and happy effects of finding Him*.—

I. THE ORDINANCES ARE THE PLACE WHERE CHRIST IS TO BE FOUND OF POOR SINNERS. 1. What are the ordinances? The Divine ordinance of meditation. Christian conference about spiritual matters. Singing of the Lord's praises. Prayer. The Word. Baptism and the Lord's Supper. 2. Confirm this doctrine. The ordinances are by Christ's own appointment the trysting-places wherein He has promised to be found of those that seek Him. Trysting-places for sinners, where they may be convinced, converted, and regenerated. Trysting-places for saints, where they may receive life more abundantly. They are the places wherein His people seek Him, who know best where He is to be found. They are what the Lord has allowed His people to supply the want of heaven, until they come there. 3. Apply this doctrine. It reproves those who slight attendance on ordinances; those who come to meet some they have worldly business with; who come, but not to find Christ there; who stand in the way of others attending on ordinances. It urges to seek Christ in ordinances. He is well worth the seeking. II. PEOPLE MAY COME TO ORDINANCES AND NOT FIND CHRIST. 1. Reasons on the sinner's side. Some have no design of finding Christ in ordinances at all. Many are indifferent whether they find Christ or not. Some desire not to see Him at all. Some cannot wait patiently at the gates. 2. Improve this point. Seek Him sincerely and uprightly with all your heart. Seek Him honestly and generously for Himself. Seek Him fervently, humbly, diligently, mournfully. Seek Him till you find. III. THEN DO PEOPLE FIND CHRIST WHEN, UPON A SAVING DISCOVERY OF CHRIST MADE TO THEIR SOULS, THEY CLOSE WITH HIM BY FAITH. 1. Things in general touching the finding of Christ. There is a twofold finding of Him, initial and progressive. The immediate effect of the former is union, of the other actual communion with Christ. Some things to be observed. Sinners in their natural state have lost God. Man is a seeking creature. There is no satisfying of the soul till it come to God. God is in Christ, and is to be found in Him only. 2. More particularly explain the soul's finding Christ. The soul savingly discovers and discerns Jesus Christ by a new light let into it. There is a twofold discovery of Him in the gospel, objective and subjective. There are six things the soul sees in Christ: A transcendent excellency. A fulness for the supply of all wants. A suitableness to meet his case and to glorify God. The Wisdom of God in Him. An ability to save. Willingness to save. Upon this discovery of Christ made unto and by the soul, the soul closes with Christ by faith. Such a discovery is not made to the soul till it be hunger-bitten. The nature of the object discovered speaks for itself. And the discovery is always attended with a heart-conquering power. IV. SINNERS FINDING CHRIST FIND LIFE. 1. Unfold that life which sinners find. It is a life of grace, in regeneration. A life of favour with God. A life of new obedience. A life of comfort. And eternal life. 2. What are the qualities of this life? It is a Divine life. A life of the whole man. A pleasant life. A persevering life. A growing life. 3. Confirm this doctrine. The sinner finding Christ finds all things necessary to make him happy. Look to the whole of Christ's purchase, what He bought for poor sinners with His blood; and the soul finding Christ finds it all, and may say, "It is all mine." (*T. Boston, D.D.*)

Wisdom's rewards:—Some man might say, "Why should we watch so much for Wisdom? What shall we get by so much labour? Lest any should refuse and despise Wisdom, as terrified with the mention of so much pains in getting, Wisdom promises large rewards of life and favour from God. Heavy things grow light, when great rewards are propounded. And if any man be inquisitive to know what is that blessedness promised to such as take pains to get Wisdom, she tells them that their diligence in seeking her shall be recompensed in a most copious reward. As if she had said, "They that find Me shall not obtain some vulgar matter of little weight, but an incomparable treasure of all good things—to wit, life, which all men naturally desire, and eternal life, which only God can give, and all that a man can justly desire; and so shall he be fully happy in God's favour." (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*)

Life:—The life that is found in Christ, who is our life—the life which, if diligently sought, shall be assuredly found, and which, when found, fills the soul with joy and peace. I. THE ADVANTAGE OF SEEKING CHRIST. We seek not only Him personally, but all that is in Him. We seek Him in whom all fulness dwells, and in seeking Him all the fulness that dwells in Him becomes ours. In finding Christ we find happiness, holiness, and heaven; pardon, peace, a quiet conscience, relief from the weary load of sin. II. WHAT DO WE FIND IN CHRIST? Life is the great aim of all sentient beings; to obtain life, and having obtained it, to preserve it. Inquire, by way of contrast, what is gained by that life which is found elsewhere than in Christ? Sometimes life is sought in pleasure, in the world, in the love of things of the world, and in sin. Mistaking the great object of living, and pursuing a career of sin, men find that sin bringeth forth death—death of body and of soul, death for time, and death throughout eternity. There is a more excellent way, a way which has the promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. The true life commences here. This life of ours is a pilgrimage. "He that findeth life" finds a life that is clothed with immortality, that revels in eternal day, that climbs unwearied the everlasting hills, that wears the crown of everlasting victory. (*Robert Maguire, M.A.*)

And shall obtain favour of the Lord.—*Sinners interested in Christ obtaining favour of the Lord*:—I. SHOW SOME THINGS SUPPOSED IN THIS TRUTH TENDING TO CLEAR THE MEANING OF IT. 1. There is a treasure of favour for poor sinners with the Lord. A treasure speaks preciousness, variety, and abundance. 2. This treasure is locked on sinners out of Christ, they have no access to it. 3. The sinner once interested in Christ has free access to the treasure, to bring forth from thence whatever he needs. 4. The sinner, when interested in Christ, will still be needing, while he is in this world. 5. It is the privilege and duty of believers to bring forth and fetch supply for all their wants out of that treasure. II. SHOW WHEREIN THE SOUL ONCE INTERESTED IN CHRIST SHALL OBTAIN FAVOUR OF THE LORD. 1. In prosperity. They shall have balancing grace, to make them carry evenly and usefully. Balancing providences; some such mixture of bitterness in their cup as keeps them from miskenning themselves. 2. In personal outward affliction. But they shall be bettered by it; supported under it, and have deliverance in due time. 3. In desertion. They shall never be totally or finally forsaken. 4. In temptation. They shall either be made to keep their ground against the temptation, or at least temptation shall not be allowed to gain a complete victory over them. 5. Even when fallen into sin, the Lord will not leave them, nor cast them off. 6. In time of public calamity. They shall either be hid, or gracious favour shall be mixed with the trouble, or the sting shall be taken out of it. 7. Death. They shall then be freed from sin and freed from trouble. III. CONFIRM THIS DOCTRINE. 1. Sinners have a right to the whole treasure of favour in Christ, in whom they are interested. 2. Jesus Christ is the dispenser of the treasure, the high Steward of the house of heaven. 3. The enjoyment is secured by the covenant of promises. 4. They have each of them a private key to the treasure, and that is faith. Improve this doctrine—(1) In a way of information; (2) in a way of encouragement. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *What found with wisdom?*—I. WISDOM MAY BE FOUND. Else these promises were annexed in vain. II. IF WISDOM BE FOUND, LIFE IS FOUND WITHAL. 1. Natural. 2. Spiritual. 3. Eternal life. III. NOT ONLY LIFE, BUT GOD'S FAVOUR IS GOTTEN ALSO BY GETTING WISDOM. 1. He shall find favour from God in receiving Him. 2. He shall find favour from God in rewarding him here. 3. He shall find favour from God in preserving him from many dangers. 4. He shall receive favour from God in preferring, or crowning him with eternal glory in heaven. Use—1. To confute the doctrine of merits. 2. Seek wisdom earnestly and truly; not faintly and hypo-

critically, seeing ye look not only for life, but also for God's favour from thence, which is the very cause of life, and the very life of life itself. (*Francis Taylor, B.D.*) *The favour of God obtained by wisdom*:—The intention of this text is to represent a very great blessedness to good men, whether in the present or a future state, annexed to wisdom, or religious virtue, in consequence of their obtaining God's favour. I. HOW GREAT, HOW SUBSTANTIAL AND COMPREHENSIVE A FELICITY THIS IS. It will be easily allowed, if we consider our most obvious notions of the Deity, as a Being infinitely perfect and all-sufficient, the fountain of life and happiness. We judge of the importance of any person's favour, and of the security and advantage which may arise to ourselves from it, by his power and capacity. It is impossible that God's favourites should be unhappy, because He neither wanteth power to effect what His good-will inclineth to, nor wisdom to contrive the best method for their safety and advantage. Though there are objects suitable to the inclinations God hath planted in our nature, yet even supposing them sought after, and enjoyed without sin, they come short of being our true felicity, both in the perfection of degree and in the duration of them. They cannot yield solid contentment and satisfaction to the mind of man, because they are too low in their kind for its high capacity; and they are of a perishing nature; pleasure is but for a season, honour only an empty shadow; nothing can be more variable and uncertain than it is. But the favour of God is a substantial good, and never-failing foundation of hope and spring of comfort; it extendeth to all possible cases, and is a support in the most distressed situation of affairs. II. UPON WHAT GROUNDS MAY WE EXPECT THAT, IF WE FIND WISDOM, WE SHALL OBTAIN FAVOUR OF THE LORD? How can men do anything that is good out of a regard to the Deity, unless they first believe Him to be good, and a lover of virtue? The greatest corruptions of religion and morality have taken their rise from wrong notions of God. But how doth it appear that the wise and virtuous obtain favour of the Lord, since His providence doth not distinguish them by marks of favour, but, by the confession of the sacred writers themselves, they are in as bad a condition with respect to the affairs of this life as the wicked? This objection hath been advanced against the equity and wisdom of Providence, and as seeming to prove that the affairs of this world are under no intelligent direction, but left to blind chance or necessity; but this is not conclusive against the doctrine of the text for the following reasons: 1. The present state is appointed in the wisdom of God to be a state of discipline and improvement. 2. The sufferings of good men in the present state may be considered as trials, and it is consistent with the favour of God to His servants that He should try them in order to their growth in virtue, and so becoming still more the objects of His favour. 3. We must keep in mind those things promised in the gospel. Two practical reflections. (1) See what is the noblest end of life, the worthiest of our affections, our choice, and of our most diligent and constant endeavours, that we may attain it. (2) The way to obtain this end is plainly marked out to us in Scripture, and it is very inexcusable folly and thoughtlessness if we mistake it. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

Ver. 36. He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul.—*The sinner wrongeth his own soul*:—I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY A MAN SINNING AGAINST CHRIST? 1. To take partial views of His glorious gospel. 2. When He would wreath His gentle yoke about our necks, to kick at the restraint, and refuse it. 3. To coldly hear the offers of His grace, and grieve His Holy Spirit in not fully and spiritually accepting them. II. HOW CAN WE BE SAID TO HATE THE ONLY BEING WHO CAN SAVE US? This expression seems wholly inconsistent with the natural dispositions of men. Yet as a fact, men may be seen all around us loving the ways of death. 1. We may be said to love death when we suffer and encourage our desires to go forth and loiter about the precincts of it. The thoughts and desires of a man tell us what he is. 2. We love the captivity of death when we make but few and faint efforts to break the chains of it. III. HOW DOES A SINNER WHO LOVES DEATH WRONG HIS OWN SOUL? 1. He does it by choosing to be a beggar in the midst of riches. 2. He does it when he treats his soul as a fleeting mortal thing. We do it great wrong when we labour to fill it with too much of the creature, and with too little of Christ. (*F. G. Crossman.*) *Sinners wrong themselves*:—1. They snatch their souls away from wisdom. 2. They spoil (rob) their souls. 3. They infect their souls with the guilt of sin. 4. They corrupt them with the filth of sin. 5. They disgrace their souls. 6. They torment their souls with the pangs of conscience. 7. They betray their souls to sin. 8. They destroy them eternally.

(Francis Taylor, B.D.) *Wronging one's self*:—It would be repugnant to our moral sense to overlook the consequences of sin, and put on the same plane one whose life had been one of spotless purity and a grey-haired sinner who had at the eleventh hour found pardon. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" is an inflexible law. Notice certain particulars in which the principle is seen.

1. Opportunities are lost. A man wrongs his own soul by the sinful neglect of God's commands in his early years. Those grand years freighted with golden chances of service for God and humanity, can never be recalled. 2. Moral growth is arrested. You may secure the resumption of arrested processes in a crystal or a plant, but as you ascend the scale of being difficulties increase. In one's moral nature the law we illustrate holds inexorable sway. He that sinneth against God dwarfs, deadens, and stultifies his better faculties. Take a single faculty, like the memory. There is retention as well as reception. The passing thought, the momentary impulse, the fugitive desire we entertain—all these are ours; yea, they are us. We are ever enriching or defacing our moral life through the faculty of memory. 3. Look at the true end of our life here, service for God and our fellow-men. If that service is unrendered, it remains undone for ever. 4. Look at the effects of our sin on others. True religion in a man is that which earnestly and habitually makes for righteousness and holy obedience. If it does not keep from sin, it is not a religion sufficient to save. (H. A. Stimson, D.D.)

Wronging the soul:—Of all created things the soul of man most resembles the Deity. It is like Himself in its nature. The soul is a being possessed of volition, with powers of imagining the loftiest themes, of conceiving and working out the most difficult inquiries. The Divine image is still traced upon the soul. It is therefore true that "he who sinneth against God sinneth against (wrongeth) his own soul." I. THE SINNER WRONGS HIS OWN SOUL IN THIS WORLD, BY DEBASING IT. Indulgence in vice wrongs and destroys the moral nature. Even the intellectual faculty is hurt and wronged by sin. Sensuality debases the mind. He who is the slave of sin occupies a lower position in creation than the man who by virtue asserts the high prerogative of nature, who by his goodness and righteousness strives to assimilate his soul to God. He wrongs the soul who makes it subservient to the base requirements of the body. The intellectual faculty will censure sin, and so will the moral faculty. Therefore these properties should be cultivated. The conscience is seared by indulgence in sin, and the Holy Spirit is grieved. II. SIN WRONGS THE SOUL BY SUBJECTING IT TO PUNISHMENT IN THE WORLD TO COME. That this is true is evident from the teaching of nature as well as religion. The mind has reasoned correctly when it wrought out for itself the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and proved an existence beyond the grave. The living being is not the outer frame. Consciousness is perceived to be a simple and indivisible power—an essential property of the mind. The destruction of matter cannot of necessity be considered the destruction of living agents. The destruction of the body and all its organs does not necessarily involve the destruction of the reflecting powers; they may not even be suspended in death. Upon the immortality of the soul philosophy speaks the precepts of religion. Behold, then, the excellency of the soul, and the guilt of him who wrongs it. How is it possible that he who wrongs the heavenly Essence can escape the just judgments of God? But the Christian can realise the dignity of the soul from other considerations. He has the evidence of his own heart. Christianity requires the submission of the whole heart; the acceptance of its mysteries; the noblest self-denial, the most exalted virtue, the highest holiness, the perfection of humanity. But who except the Christian can realise this? From the death-bed of the unbelieving may be learned the misery, here and hereafter, of those who wrong their own soul. (David Ross, B.A.)

The wronged soul:—I. THE WRONG SIN DOES THE NATURE OF THE SOUL. 1. Sin is inhuman. 2. Sin is unnatural. 3. Sin is the degradation of human nature. II. THE WRONG SIN DOES THE CAPACITIES OF THE SOUL. The soul of man is a great capacity for God. There is no punishment worse than the habit of sin, which comes from sinning. To do wrong is worse than to suffer any calamity. Pain is soon over, misfortune is for a moment, calamity is temporary. But sin is permanent. It does an irreparable injury to the soul. It keeps man out of his heritage. It defeats the end for which man was made. God made us in His image. III. THE WRONG SIN DOES THE POWER OF THE SOUL. 1. The conscience, which is that power of the soul by which we recognise the moral quality of actions. 2. Sin also wrongs the will. Sin enfeebles man at the most vital part of his nature. Sin wrongs the soul in every faculty and power. Conclusion: (1) Of all evils that man can know or suffer, sin is the

worst. (2) The sinner makes his own hereafter. Remember that heaven is a holy soul in a holy place. (3) I cannot, I dare not, close without a word of hope for any troubled and penitent soul. (S. Z. Batten.) *The self-destroyer*:—The particular truth of the text is, that sin is not only an offence to God, whom no man hath seen or can see, but it is a distinct and irreparable injury to the man, the sinner himself. And that is the only way to get hold of man. Tell a man that by sinning he is hurting the unseen God, and what does he care? You can only get hold of a man in so far as any truth you teach or any requisite you demand impinges upon himself. Touch the little Self and you have put a hook in the nose of leviathan. God can make you possess in your bones the effects of your moral action. (J. Parker, D.D.) *The wrong done to the soul by unbelief*:—I. UNBELIEF, OR A

SINNER'S NOT BELIEVING, ACCEPTING, CLOSING WITH, AND RESTING ON CHRIST FOR SALVATION, IS THE SIN AGAINST CHRIST BY WAY OF EMINENCY. What treatment of Christ is it that is this sinning against Him? There is a doctrinal and a practical treatment of Him. Living ignorant of Christ and the fundamental truths of the gospel. Living insensible of our absolute need of Christ. Not believing the doctrines of the gospel. Of this treatment of Christ there are two evidences: their not seeking Him with the utmost diligence; their seeking life and salvation some other way—the way of the covenant of works or the way of uncovenanted mercy.

II. CONFIRM THIS DOCTRINE. 1. Faith in Christ is honouring Him in a special manner; therefore unbelief must be a special dishonour. 2. Unbelief is the great Antichrist in the heart, sitting up there in downright opposition to the Son of God. 3. This sin engrosses the whole soul to itself against Christ. 4. It is the sin that ruins the hearers of the gospel, with whom Christ has to do. 5. It is equal to the grossest sins against the light of nature. 6. It is above these sins in heinousness. 7. It has none that goes beyond it but the sin against the Holy Ghost. 8. It is a sin directly striking against the glorious office wherewith Christ is invested, and while He is in the actual exercise of that office. III. UNBELIEF IS SIN AGAINST CHRIST

BY WAY OF EMINENCY, AND THIS APPEARS FROM A VIEW OF SOME PARTICULAR PIECES OF MALIGNITY WRAPPED UP THEREIN. 1. It is a despising Him as the Father's choice.

2. It is a trampling on His love in taking the mediatory office. 3. It is a treating of Him as if He were an impostor. 4. It is a contempt poured upon His precious blood. 5. It is a frustrating of the ends of the death of Christ, as far as lies in the unbeliever's power. 6. It is a declining of His government most reproachfully. From this doctrine learn lessons for saints, for sinners, for all. IV. THE SINNER AGAINST CHRIST BY UNBELIEF WRONGS HIS OWN SOUL. 1. Wrongs his own soul really. He does in very deed do hurt and bring damage to himself, body and soul. He keeps his soul in a state of alienation from God. He keeps his soul under the guilt of all his sins. In a state of inability to do what is good or acceptable in the sight of God. It fixes the soul in a state of condemnation. 2. Wrongs his own soul only; not Christ whom he sins against. All sin is against the mind and honour of Christ, but no sin is against His happiness. (T. Boston, D.D.)

The indignity of sin:—There are various definitions of sins, each one of which is true according to our standpoint. If we regard sin as a violation of man's true destiny, which destiny we read not only in God's loving command, but also in the very law of man's own being, then sin is the transgressing of the law. If we regard sin as variation from the right, the good, the true, then sin is unrighteousness. If we regard sin as the negation of man's true nature as a spiritual being, and the identifying of him with the things of sense, then sin is materialism. If we regard sin as the fixing of the affections—affections that were intended for glories beyond the stars—upon the perishing thing of this world, then sin is worldliness. And, finally, if we regard sin as the failure or refusal of the soul to apprehend and confide in the unseen, then sin is unbelief. But it is always the one and self-same thing, the same grim and ghastly thing—in the godless man of the world, and the ruffian who outrages law, and the smooth libertine and vulgar thief; in the respectable atheist who says there is no God, and the brave outlaw who lives his creed and acts upon his belief. For, while sins differ, sin—the evil root out of which all sins proceed—is the same. Sins are but symptoms; the disease called sin lies deeper in the soul. And oh! it is an awful thought, well calculated to humble us all into the very dust, that no matter what our sins may be—no matter how decent, how respectable, how secret—they each and all proceed out of the same fell disorder as the sins of the veriest wretch who outrages man's laws and exhausts man's patience by his wickedness! And now that sin has been traced to its last analysis, let us consider its results on the soul. It was Wisdom that of old

spoke the words of my text, and her voice is still uplifted among the sons of men, "He that sinneth against Me wrongeth his own soul." It is true that he wrongs the souls of others also. But it is not of this that I now speak. The worst wrong, the deepest indignity, is done to the soul that commits the sin. 1. He wrongs his soul by the degradation he inflicts upon it, the evil that he scatters through it. The soul comes as a new creation from God. It is enshrined in a body that inherits evil—evil propensities, insurgent affections; and it has a hard struggle at best, and cannot win the victory but by the help of God. But the man who sins makes a voluntary surrender of the nobler to the baser part, and so appropriates the frailty of the baser nature, and makes it a part of his soul's being. Each sin by a certain reflex action spreads disorder through man's whole nature. In this way the very bodily appetite may become the appetite also of the soul. Oh, grim and ghastly are the evils which sin inflicts upon the body! It dulls the eye, and palsies the hand, and banishes manly grace from the brow, and coarsens and brutalises the human face Divine. But something far more dreadful than this befalls the sinner. The soul takes on the vice of the body. The worst symptom of drunkenness, for instance, is not the craving of the body, but the craving of the soul. The soul of the inebriate begins to crave the false excitement of drink, and an obliquity corresponding to that of the body begins to set up in the soul. The eye of the drunkard sees false or sees double: the mind's eye begins to see false also. And so it comes to pass that the soul of the drunkard becomes untruthful. This is the reason that men cannot trust the word of a drunkard. So also the deadly sin of impurity. The very mind and conscience become defiled. The mind panders to the body. Oh, horrible degradation! And so we find that there is a correspondence and correlation between different kinds of sin. The sensual man is always a cruel man. The drunkard is a liar. The thief is simply covetous and selfish, just like the worldling and the miser. In all these things man's whole nature is shamed and dishonoured. In all his being he is degraded and coarsened by his sin. 2. And this becomes all the more evident when we examine the wrong which sin does to man's characteristic powers. And first, his intellectual faculties, his reason, his power to know. It is a great and awful truth, little heeded, little understood, that all the powers of man's intellect are blunted and weakened by sin. Who has not seen the splendour of some lordly intellect first dimmed, then obscured, by excess or folly, until its fitful light would blaze at intervals, and then go out in piteous darkness, or fade into still more pitiable imbecility? But even more pitiable, if possible, is it to see the royal intellect of man forced into the base service of the world, and compelled to drudge like a very slave in the interest of sordid vice, or avarice, or other selfishness. Who does not know how such intellect declines into trickery or beastly cunning, and it watches like a fox for a chance to deceive, or like a predatory beast to seize its prey? To such a man high thoughts and noble purposes become simply impossible. Not less disastrous and dishonouring is the influence of sin on man's moral nature—on his power to discriminate and choose between right and wrong. Of the debilitating effect of sin upon the will of man I need not speak at length. All observation and all experience prove that this is its immediate, unvarying, inevitable effect. He who once yields to do wrong will find it harder the next time to do right, until he speedily becomes powerless to choose God and resist evil. But of the darkening, paralysing effect of sin upon a moral sense not so much is commonly thought, though such effect is not less immediate and inevitable. The moral sense, which at first is quick to discriminate, begins, under the pressure of sin, to lose the keenness of perception. The high sense of honour and of truthfulness is dulled. The good seems to be less good, and the evil does not seem to be so very evil, until at last that soul calls evil good and good evil. Woe to the soul that is in such a case! He has abdicated his throne, and lost his regal state, and broken his sceptre, and flung away his crown. Finally, even more debasing is the effect of sin upon the affections. This would seem to be the worst degradation of all—that man should not only sin his intellect and will and conscience away, but that he should love his shame, that his soul should be enamoured of its degradation. And yet, who does not know that even this is the effect of sin? Through it men learn to love the base things of this world and lose the power to love the nobler things. What is life to such a soul but shame? What shall death be but the beginning of an eternal bereavement? One word in conclusion. All the effects of sin may be summed up in one dreadful word—death. The dying of the soul, the decay of its faculties, the languishing of its strength—the progressive unending dying of an immortal soul, with all its unending anguish of unsatisfied longing, unfulfilled

desire, baffled hope, pitiless remorse, remediless desire—this is the dread reality at which men ought to tremble. It is no chimera of imagination; it is no spectre of the future—it is a present reality. It is doing its ghastly work even now in every soul where sin reigns. For the soul that sins is dying. The wages of sin is death. (*Bp. S. S. Harris.*) *The self-hurt of sin*:—Wisdom, as used here, is the law of God concerning human life and conduct, and sin is the transgression of that law. The text, not in a spirit of haughty denunciation, but with sad and kindly warning, declares that he who transgresses that law wrongs his own soul, is the author of his own sorrow and suffering and loss. God's laws, under His immediate direction, work out the penalty of their own violation; in part here, fully hereafter. All God's purposes in us are accomplished by the operation of beneficent law. To break the law is to thwart His purposes, and bring the ruin which naturally follows such a course. The law of the piano is, that its strings shall be tuned in harmony, and that under the skilful touch of the key light-cushioned hammers shall strike them so that they give out genuine music. But if you fail to tune them in harmony, and then, lifting the lid, strike them with iron hammers, you get discord and destruction. You have transgressed the law of the piano. The law of the watch is to submit to balance-wheel and regulator; take off the one and misplace the other, and your watch reports falsely all the time. You have transgressed its law. The law of the circulation of the blood is from heart to artery, capillary, and back again by the veins; and as it goes it repairs waste, carries off useless matter, and gives health and strength. But if you open an artery and send the blood outside its course, you die. You have transgressed the law. How sinful and self-destructive, then, is the violation of law, and how fatally does he who thus sins wrong his own soul! I. SIN AGAINST SPIRITUAL LAW. 1. The law of nutrition. Hunger, flavour, and the delight of the palate are God's arrangements for insuring the taking of proper food to repair the waste and supply the growth of the body. Break the law, and eat for the sake of pleasing the palate or increasing sociability, then indigestion, dulness, sleeplessness at night and sluggishness by day follow. Who shall estimate the sin against the temple of the soul? 2. The nervous system. Its motor power is intended to carry messages from the mind to the muscles, ordering work done and motion performed. Properly governed and temperately used, what usefulness, health, and abundance of valuable labour accomplished may result! Abuse it, and exhaustion, prostration, paralysis follow. II. THE SPIRITUAL HURT. 1. To the truth-perceiving faculties. The judgment and reason, acting under the restraint of a pure conscience, leads to the truth in a thousand ways: in business, society, pleasure, habits, indulgences—in all necessary things—and the life is guided in righteousness and wisdom. But let unholy ambition, improper desire for gain, any form of wicked selfishness, get control of these faculties, and how they become warped, blinded, and misguided! 2. To the power of self-control. This is the battle of growing evil habits against the will—growing more and more impatient of restraint, more and more defiant of conscience and will, till appetite, strengthened into habit, leads manhood captive and blots out every hope and joy. 3. To the religious nature. Properly acted upon by the Holy Spirit, it becomes God's audience-chamber in the soul; the natal chamber of the holiest purposes; the place where the strength comes which gives martyr-power. Sinned against, the demons of superstition, distrust, hatred of good, vile affections, scepticism, and cold, dark atheism come in to torment the soul. To the joys of memory and hope. Every life gathers up all its past and holds it in its present possession for evermore by faithful memory; and if that past be one of holy purpose and noble endeavour, every record it holds will be a joy for ever; its pains will turn to pleasure, its hardships to victories, its struggles to triumphs. But if its records be of deceit and dishonesty, of lust and recklessness, then remorse pours her bitterness into every recollection. III. HE THAT SINS AGAINST WISDOM INTERFERES WITH GOD'S PURPOSES FOR HIS FUTURE. God has great ambitions for us. 1. He would build in us a noble character. Sin defeats His wish, and makes us in character ignoble. 2. He would make us useful; sin makes us hurtful to others. 3. He would make us happy; sin makes us wretched, utterly and for ever. 4. He would have us grow in spiritual beauty, symmetry, and power; sin deforms, enfeebles, and mars our being. (*C. N. Sims, D.D.*) *The wrong which sin does to human nature*:—The sinner does a wrong, indeed, to others. Sin is, to all the dearest interests of society, a desolating power. It brings misery into the daily lot of millions. But all the injury, great and terrible as it is, which the sinner does or can inflict upon others, is not equal to the injury that he inflicts upon himself. Does any one say he is glad that it is himself that he injures

most? What a feeling of disinterested justice is that! Because he has not only wronged others, but ruined himself, is his course any the less guilty, or unhappy, or unnatural? I say unnatural; and this is a point on which I wish to insist, in the consideration of that wrong which the moral offender does to himself. The world, alas! is not only in the awful condition of being filled with sin, and filled with misery in consequence, but of thinking that this is the natural order of things. Sin is a thing of course; it is taken for granted that it must exist very much in the way that it does; and men are everywhere easy about it, as if they were acting out the principles of their moral constitution, and almost as if they were fulfilling the will of God. 1. Sin does a wrong to reason. There are instances in which sin, in various forms of vice and vanity, absolutely destroys reason. There are other and more numerous cases in which it employs the faculty, but employs it in a toil most degrading to its nature. There is reasoning, indeed, in the mind of a miser; the solemn arithmetic of profit and loss. There is reasoning in the schemes of unscrupulous ambition; the absorbing and agitating intrigue for office or honour. There is reasoning upon the modes of sensual pleasure; and the whole power of a very acute mind is sometimes employed and absorbed in plans, and projects, and imaginations of evil indulgence. But what an unnatural desecration is it, for reason—sovereign, majestic, all-comprehending reason—to contract its boundless range to the measure of what the hand can grasp; to be sunk so low as to idolise outward or sensitive good; to make its god not indeed of wood or stone, but of a sense or a nerve! 2. Sin is a kind of insanity. So far as it goes, it makes man an irrational creature; it makes him a fool. The consummation of sin is ever, and in every form, the extreme of folly. And it is that most pitiable folly which is puffed up with arrogance and self-sufficiency. The infatuation of the inebriate man, who is elated and gay just when he ought to be most depressed and sad, we very well understand. But it is just as true of every man that is intoxicated by any of his senses or passions, by wealth, or honour, or pleasure, that he is infatuated—that he has abjured reason. What clearer dictate of reason is there than to prefer the greater good to the lesser good? But every offender, every sensualist, every avaricious man, sacrifices the greater good—the happiness of virtue and piety—for the lesser good, which he finds in his senses or in the perishing world. Nor is this the strongest view of the case. He sacrifices the greater for the less, without any necessity for it. He might have both. A pure mind can derive more enjoyment from this world and from the senses than an impure mind. What bad man ever desired that his child should be like himself? And what a testimony is this, what a clear and disinterested testimony, to the unhappiness of a sinful course! How truly, and with what striking emphasis, did the venerable Cranmer reply, when told that a certain man had cheated him: “No he has cheated himself.” 3. Sin does a wrong to conscience. There is a conscience in every man, which is as truly a part of his nature as reason or memory. The offender against this, therefore, violates no unknown law nor impracticable rule. From the very teaching of his nature he knows what is right, and he knows that he can do it; and his very nature, therefore, instead of furnishing him with apologies for wilful wrong, holds him inexcusable. He will have the desired gratification; and to obtain it he sets his foot upon that conscience, and crushes it down to dishonour and agony worse than death. 4. Sin does a wrong to the affections. How does it mar even that image of the affections, that mysterious shrine from which their revealings flash forth, “the human face Divine”; bereaving the world of more than half its beauty! Can you ever behold sullenness clouding the clear, fair brow of childhood—or the flushed cheek of anger, or the averted and writhen features of envy, or the dim and sunken eye and baggared aspect of vice, or the red signals of bloated excess hung out on every feature, proclaiming the fire that is consuming within—without feeling that sin is the despoiler of all that the affections make most hallowed and beautiful? But these are only indications of the wrong that is done and the ruin that is wrought in the heart. Nature has made our affections to be full of tenderness; to be sensitive and alive to every touch; to cling to their cherished objects with a grasp from which nothing but cruel violence can sever them. But sin enters into this world of the affections, and spreads around the death-like coldness of distrust; the word of anger falls like a blow upon the heart, or avarice hardens the heart against every finer feeling; or the insane merriment, or the sullen stupor of the inebriate man falls like a thunderbolt amidst the circle of kindred and children. Oh! the hearts where sin is to do its work should be harder than the nether millstone; yet it enters in among affections, all warm, all sensitive, all gushing forth in

tenderness; and, deaf to all their pleadings, it does its work as if it were some demon of wrath that knew no pity, and heard no groans, and felt no relenting! (O. Dewey, D.D.)

CHAPTER IX.

Vers. 1-6. Wisdom hath builded her house. — Wisdom's invitation: — The Bible is fully of mystery, not merely in its doctrines, but also in the manner and in the language by which the truths of revelation are brought before us. In the personification of this passage, Wisdom is seen sympathising with man, caring for man, loving man, diffusing abroad amongst men the benefits of harmony, and of purity, and of eternal life. **I. THE PROVISION MADE BY HEAVENLY WISDOM FOR THE SPIRITUAL WANTS OF MEN.** When Wisdom is here represented as having furnished her house, and built her dwelling, you have an idea, a correct conception of the Church of God. God is the builder of the Church, and the foundation is deep, broad, and wide, and altogether sufficient for the purposes of human salvation. Men are represented as living stones, quickened and animated, and hewn and fitted to occupy the position for which they are intended, cemented by Divine love, held in attraction to the foundation, and consequently held in relation to each other. In the passage the building is characterised by stability and durability. "Seven pillars." Pillars, in Scripture, are emblems of strength, beauty, and durability. The number seven is indicative of perfection. Every pillar, every buttress, every support that Christianity needs the wisdom of God has provided. In the passages is the further idea of a gracious and adequate provision. "She hath killed her killings." This is the idea of sacrifice. The idea of what is grateful and refreshing is likewise presented. "She hath mingled her wine." Easterns mingled their wines in order, by the power of spices, to make them more attractive, and to strengthen their flavour. Then the "table is furnished." Divine truth in its simplest and most complicated form—Divine truth that can guide, and purify, and train the spirit up for heaven—the truth that can make you free—the truth that can bless you with present happiness and eternal glory, is presented in the gospel. The provision of infinite love, then, is precisely adapted to your need. **II. THE INVITATION PRESENTED TO MANKIND TO ACCEPT OF THIS PROVISION.** 1. The parties employed to utter the invitation. When Wisdom, as the queen of heaven, spreads her table, she sends out her maidens. They are emblems of feebleness, purity, and attractiveness; and this is just the character of the messengers that were sent out by the Lord. 2. The persons to whom the invitation is directed. Here represented as being foolish, indiscreet, unwise, incompetent to guide their own affairs, incapable of obtaining that support and comfort which they need. Here is a correct idea of the ruined, the guilty, and the helpless condition of man. The gospel is preached to the ignorant, the guilty, and the wretched. 3. The scene of proclamation is described. It is made in the chief places of congress, at the opening of the gate, and the going in of the doors. This teaches us that the proclamation is to be made in the midst of large multitudes of people. **III. THE CONSIDERATION BY WHICH THIS INVITATION IS ENFORCED AND PRESSED HOME UPON ATTENTION.** There is not the mere announcement of provision, not the mere proclamation of the fact, but an entreaty on the part of those who go out with the messages. "Forsake the foolish and live." Life is valuable—all life is valuable. The life of religion, the life of God in the soul of man, is the highest form of life. There is an appeal in the text to the love of enjoyment. There is an appeal also to the love of wisdom. Have you obeyed the invitation? (George Smith, D.D.) *The rival banquets* (with verses 13-18):—**I. THE RESEMBLANCES** between them are set forth in a very striking manner. 1. It is the same class of men that is invited. They are in both cases "the simple," "the void of understanding." 2. The invitations are similar in—(1) Their universality; (2) their publicity (vers. 3 and 14); and (3) their urgency. Wisdom sends forth her messengers, and so, presumably, does Folly. **II. But the DIFFERENCES** are no less marked. 1. In the banquets themselves. Wisdom has built her grand, substantial palace or temple (ver. 1), in virtue of her share in creation (chap. viii. 30), and she has provided a satisfying, nourishing, and glad some feast (ver. 2). Not so Folly. In consistency with her parasitic nature, it is not her own goods that she creates and prepares, but

she invites to the abuse or illicit enjoyment of the goods God has already bestowed. Wisdom sits as a princess in her rightful home; Folly is hardly more than at the door of her house, which is not described. 2. In the inducements presented. These are not the feasts themselves, but additional commendations setting forth their relative advantages. In the one case satisfying and nourishing viands are offered, whose result is life; in the other, the thing presented is pleasure, and that which is to give it is only spoken of in a mysterious, allusive way. It is the illicit and secret enjoyment that is the charm. But if the Queen of Sheba declared that "the half had not been told her" of the true wisdom, how much of the truth is kept back in the promises and fair speeches of Folly! Those who are once within her house are to all intents and purposes dead men, and are as if they were already "in the depths of Sheol!" (*St. J. A. Frere, M.A.*) *Wisdom's house*:—I. **WHAT PERSON IS ALLUDED TO BY THE DESIGNATION OF "WISDOM"?** (*chap. viii. 22-31*). Here we have the eternity of Christ plainly set forth; His absolute Sovereignty saying, "By Me kings reign and princes decree justice." He also assures us of His love: "I love them that love Me, and those that seek Me early shall find Me." He also speaks of His extensive resources: "Riches and honour are with Me, yea durable riches and righteousness." II. **THE HOUSE WHICH WISDOM HAS BUILT.** 1. **An indestructible house.** He formed, in the counsels of eternity, by unerring wisdom, a plan which no finite mind could have ever suggested, and which can admit of no improvement. We are thankful for a good plan, when we reflect that the permanence of a building is often, in some measure at least, dependent upon it. This building rests on the securest foundation—the three persons in the ever-blessed Trinity, the perfections of God, and the all-sufficient righteousness of the incarnate One. It reposes, not on the yielding sand of human merit or mortal workmanship, but on the Rock of Ages, which time cannot crumble or change. Not only is the foundation quite safe and immovable, but the superstructure is equally strong. In fact, it is perfectly invincible. "She hath hewn her seven pillars." Pillars are used as the supports and ornaments of buildings, and the number seven is the symbol of perfection. We take the seven pillars to denote perfect strength and beauty. We next observe that Wisdom's house affords perfect security to its inhabitants. It is a fortress, a strong tower, a house of defence, a castle of safety, to those who enjoy the privilege of dwelling in it. 2. **A house of instruction.** It is emphatically the house of Wisdom. A school where the best lessons are taught, in the best possible mode of teaching, and by the best of all teachers. 3. **A banqueting house** (*ver. 2*). The Church of the living God is a banqueting-hall in which we have the gospel feast prepared and exhibited for all who have a spiritual appetite; and the invitation is freely and earnestly given to all, for there is plenty of room and an abundance of provisions. The entertainment is in reality a feast upon a sacrifice, and what is that sacrifice on which all who wish may feast but the sacrifice of Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"? (*S. Waller.*)

Vers. 3, 4. Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither.—*The choice of wisdom*:—Life is reduced to an alternative; there is clearly marked out for us all, at the beginning of our life, that all is one thing or the other, wisdom or folly. To these two voices, all the noise and tumult of life, and all the diverse voices in your own souls, may be reduced. They are all either the call of the wisdom of God, or they are the call of folly, sense, and sin. Let me counsel you, then—I. **TO CHOOSE.** The curse of men—and of young people especially—is that they drift into passions and habits before they know where they are. But it is a low and discreditable thing for men, old or young, that they should be the creatures and sport of the mere circumstances around them. All your life should have in it the deliberation and the resolve of a calm, settled choice. Here is the manliness of manhood, that a man has a reason for what he does, and has a will in doing it. Be the masters and lords of the circumstances in which you stand. There are two courses in life. There are but two. The two are utterly irreconcilable and discordant. You cannot have them both. Then be men, and choose. II. **CHOOSE WISDOM.** 1. Look at these two personified claimants—Wisdom and Folly. Wisdom is closely connected with uprightness of heart. It is both an intellectual and a moral excellence. Wisdom has rectitude for an essential part of it, the fibre of its very being is righteousness and holiness. This wisdom is not only an attribute of the human soul. We rise to righteousness. If a man would be wise, it must be with a wisdom that was in God before it is in him. Our prayer should be, "In Thy wisdom make us wise." A further step has to be taken. Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

There, in that living person, is the highest embodiment of all wisdom. All which is not of God is the "foolish woman." All which does not inhere in Christ, and appeal to us through and from Him, is that clamorous and persistent voice which leads us all astray, if we listen to it. The world and sense—these are her grossest forms. But there are less offensive forms besetting us all. III. CHOOSE NOW. Wisdom appeals to conscience. Folly appeals only to the sense of pleasure and the desire for its gratification. Both ask for your decision now. There is a strange tendency to put off decision. But it is an awful risk for a man to run. Every day that you live makes it less likely that you will choose. Every day that you live makes it harder for you to choose aright. Every day that you live takes away some of the power of resolving, and takes away some motive to resolve. (A. Maclaren, D.D.)

Ver. 5. *Come, eat of My bread.*—*Wisdom's invitation*:—I. THE INVITATION. He who invites is the Son of God—in the Proverbs represented as "Wisdom." Of His generous invitation we remark—1. That its acceptance is open to every human being on the face of the earth. The God of the gospel is no respecter of persons. 2. This invitation is urged with affectionate earnestness. How are men to be "compelled"? Not by coercion or legal enactments—not by bribery or the civil power—but by the mercies of God, and the gentleness of Christ. 3. There is such a character in the invitations of the gospel as leaves those inexcusable who reject them. Some excuse themselves on the ground that a self-denial which is beyond them is required, others on the ground of previous engagements. Speculations, worldliness, even domestic relationships, are pleaded as excuses. II. INDUCEMENTS TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE INVITATION. What would be inducements to accept an invitation to a feast? 1. Rank of the person inviting. Who, then, is it invites to the feast of the gospel? 2. The guests whom you were to meet. This company is select. It is composed of the wise and the good of every name: all are on a level at the feast of salvation. 3. The occasion of the entertainment. This is intended to supply you with immortal food, and to feed you with the meat that endureth unto everlasting life. 4. The consequences that may result from a refusal. Refusing this, you risk the favour of God. (J. R. Hibbard.) *The soul's diet*:—The verse, most of it, metaphorical, setting out Wisdom's instructions under the similitude of a feast, to which persons invited come and comfortably refresh themselves with meat and drink. I. THE SOUL'S DIET IS OF CHRIST'S PROVIDING. This was prefigured in the manna, and foreshadowed in the rock, that miraculously gave water to the people. 1. The Word is from Him which feeds the soul. 2. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, whereby we are fed, was of His institution, yea, of His own administration the first time. 3. He hath authority from heaven to find diet for souls. 4. None but He can provide wholesome diet. II. MEN MUST COME WHERE CHRIST'S SPIRITUAL PROVISIONS ARE TO BE HAD. 1. We are invited to come, and it is discourtesy to refuse a friendly invitation. 2. We are commanded to come, and it is disobedience not to come. 3. The feast is prepared for us. 4. The benefits gotten by it may allure you to come for it. III. WE MUST MAKE USE OF WISDOM'S PROVISION AS WELL AS COME. Coming to a feast doth no good if men be sullen, and will not eat or drink. 1. Our profitable use of God's ordinances is required. 2. We are informed beforehand to what end we are invited. 3. The gift of this undeserved favour should make us ready to receive it. 4. No good will come to us by this spiritual food if we feed not on it. They who feed well get much good to their souls. (F. Taylor, B.D.) *Wisdom's invitations*:—It seems to me as if this moment were throbbing with the invitations of an all-compassionate God. I have been told that the Cathedral of St. Mark's stands in a square in the centre of the city of Venice, and that when the clock strikes twelve at noon all the birds from the city and the regions round about the city fly to the square and settle down. It came in this wise: A large-hearted woman passing one noonday across the square saw some birds shivering in the cold, and she scattered some crumbs of bread among them, and so on from year to year until the day of her death. In her will she bequeathed a certain amount to keep up the same practice, and now, at the first stroke of the bell at noon, the birds begin to come here, and when the clock has struck twelve the square is covered with them. How beautifully suggestive! Christ comes out to feed thy soul to-day. The more hungry you feel yourselves to be, the better it is. It is noon, and the gospel clock strikes twelve. Come in flocks! Come as doves to the window! All the air is filled with the liquid chime: Come! come! come! (T. De Witt Talmage.)

Ver. 6. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.—*The foolish way forsaken*:—True religion includes two particulars, called in Scripture ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. I. **WHAT ARE THE TWO WAYS MENTIONED IN OUR TEXT**—namely, the way of the foolish and the way of understanding? 1. And with regard to the character of the foolish—whom and whose ways we are to forsake—how different is the estimate of the Word of God from the current opinions of mankind! The world usually account that man foolish who does not make the things of this life, in one or other of its aspects, the great object of his desires. The covetous man thinks him foolish who neglects the pursuit of riches, or is not skilful in obtaining them; the man of pleasure, him who does not endeavour to secure ease and amusement; the ambitious man, him who does not attain worldly honours. But, in the estimate of Scripture, though we had the worldly wisdom of each or all these classes of persons, and had not something infinitely above it, we should be numbered among the foolish. The rich man spoken of by our Lord, whose ground brought forth plentifully, was accounted a fool. And why? Because he was laying up treasures for himself upon earth, and was not rich towards God; because he disregarded the great end and object of his being; because he made no preparation for death. In short, sin of every kind—irreligion, disobedience to God, and carelessness respecting our immortal interests—is called in Scripture foolishness. And can any folly be greater than sporting, as it were, upon the brink of eternity; calling down upon us the anger of our Almighty Creator; rejecting the means which He has provided for our pardon and reconciliation, or perverting the gospel of His mercy to our own destruction? 2. Such being the way of the foolish, we may easily infer what is the way of understanding. “Behold,” said Job, “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.” “The knowledge of the Holy,” says Solomon, in the chapter from which our text is taken, “is understanding”; and “a good understanding,” says the psalmist, “have all they who do His commandments.” II. **THE IMPORTANCE OF FORSAKING THE ONE AND GOING IN THE OTHER.** “Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding.” 1. And let us inquire why we must forsake the foolish, ungodly companions, ungodly practices, ungodly thoughts, ungodly books, everything that is ungodly. It might be sufficient to satisfy our reason to answer, that our Creator has commanded us to forsake them. But, in addition, He is pleased to appeal to our hopes and fears, by promises and threatenings. “Forsake the foolish, and live”; implying that the ways of the foolish are ways of death. Shall we not, then, forsake so dangerous a path, a path beset with thorns and snares. 2. But, in addition to the command to forsake the foolish, our text adds, “And go in the way of understanding.” These two duties are indeed inseparable; for the first step out of the path of destruction is a step in the path of life; yet it is important that each should be particularly noticed, because we are too apt to content ourselves with a few feeble advances, a few superficial attainments in religion, as if the victory were complete when we are but girding on our armour for the warfare. It is not enough that we have learned that the ways of sin are ways of bitterness and folly; we must, in addition, learn what is the way of understanding: we must walk in the paths of righteousness. And infinitely important is it that we should go in this way of understanding; for by no other path can we arrive at the kingdom of heaven. The language of the text shows us that religion involves active and zealous exertion. There is one path to be forsaken, and another to be discovered and pursued. To forsake means more than careless indifference, or partial reformation, or a temporary suspension of our evil habits. It is a fixed and determined resolution. (*The Christian Observer.*)

Vers. 7-9. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee.—*Reproof*:—How to give it, and how to take it. Reproofs are like sharp knives, very needful and very useful; but they should not be in the hands of children. Those who handle them rashly will wound themselves and their neighbours. Sometimes reproofs are unskilfully administered, and sometimes unfaithfully withheld. The scorner is the principal figure in the scene of the text. He is in a state of nature. He has no spiritual life or light. He is a blusterer. He is hollow-sounding brass. He magnifies himself. He laughs at the good and at goodness. Accustomed to exaggerate everything, he exaggerates even his own wickedness. He glories in his shame. If you reprove such a scorner, you will probably get to yourself shame. You have trampled on a snake, and it is his nature to spurt forth his venom on you. Your stroke has

stirred up every motive within the scorner to redouble his blasphemy. If you could find the scorner alone, his courage would not be so great. Whisper softly into his ear your solemn reproof. Find a soft spot about him, or make one by deeds of kindness. If you gain a brother thus, it is a bloodless victory. The joy is of the purest kind that lies within our reach on earth. The second half of the lesson is, "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." There is a double blessing; one to him who gets reproof, and one to him who gives it. It is the mark of a wise man that he loves the reprover who tells him his fault. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Reproof:—I. AS INJURIOUSLY ADMINISTERED. A scorner is a man distinguished by self-ignorance, audacity, callousness, vanity, and irreverence. His grand aim is, by little sallies of wit and ridicule to raise the laugh against his superiors. To reprove these is injurious. It does them no service, but it brings pain to yourself. There are men beyond the reach of elevating influences, and it is worse than waste of labour to endeavour improving them. *II. AS USEFULLY ADMINISTERED.* 1. By rebuking a wise man you enlist his affection. Every true man will feel grateful for wise counsels. 2. By instructing a wise man you render him a benefit. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

*Godly admonitions received by the wise:—*Iron, which is one of the baser metals, may be hammered, and subjected to the most intense heat of the furnace; but though you may soften it for the time, you can never make it ductile like the precious metals. But gold, which is the most excellent of all, is the most pliant and easily wrought on, being capable of being drawn out to a degree which exceeds belief. So the most excellent tempers are the most easily wrought on by spiritual counsel and godly admonitions, but the viler sort, like the iron, are stubborn, and cannot be made pliant. (*H. G. Salter.*)

*The scorner left alone:—*The invitation of Wisdom is addressed only to the simple, not to the scorner. She lets the scorner pass by, because a word to him would recoil only in shame on herself, bringing a blush to her queenly face, and would add to the scorner's wickedness by increasing his hatred of her. Her reproof would not benefit him, but it would bring a blot upon herself: it would exhibit her as ineffectual and helpless. The bitter words of a scorner can make wisdom appear foolish, and cover virtue with a confusion which should belong only to vice. "Speak not in the hearing of a fool; for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." Indeed, there is no character so hopeless as that of the scorner; there proceeds from him, as it were, a fierce blast, which blows away all the reproaches which goodness makes to him. Reproof cannot come near him; he cannot find wisdom, though he seek it; and as a matter of fact, he never seeks it. If one attempts to punish him, it can only be with the hope that others may benefit by the example; it will have no effect upon him. To be rid of him must be the desire of every wise man, for he is an abomination to all, and with his departure contention disappears. They that scoff at things holy, and scorn the Divine Power, must be left to themselves until the beginnings of wisdom appear in them—the first sense of fear that there is a God who may not be mocked, the first recognition that there is a sanctity which they would do well at all events to reverence. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser.—*The wise man rendered wiser by instruction:—*It is an infallible mark of true wisdom, to profit by instruction. *I. TAKE A MORE ACCURATE VIEW OF THE WISE MAN; AND INQUIRE WHO IT IS THAT MAY BE TAKEN FOR SUCH.* 1. He who proposes to himself some end in what he does, and pursues that end in a rational and dexterous manner. 2. A truly wise man is the same as a good man. 3. He who to his resolution to make the attainment of moral goodness the great object of his existence adds a fixed and unalterable determination to pursue this according to Divine direction. *II. INSTRUCTION MAY BE GIVEN EVEN TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE WISE.* 1. No truly wise man will account it impossible to make accessions to his wisdom. 2. Every wise man, whatever be the nature of his wisdom, will wish it to be increased as much as possible. 3. Whenever instruction is given to him which is adapted to his character and circumstances he will account himself happy in having it, and will be the better for it. *III. WHEN INSTRUCTION IS GIVEN TO A WISE MAN, HE WILL YET BE WISER.* 1. He will endeavour to find out the motive of the person giving it. 2. He will consider the nature and tendency of the instruction or advice given. 3. He will pray that God may give him to see what is most valuable, and that He may influence his heart to profit by what is good. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The wise are willing to*

learn from any one:—President Lincoln once said that he was willing to learn from any one who could teach him anything. Doré seems to have had a like spirit. Some years ago, a clever young Englishwoman—something more than an amateur artist—was brought one day by some friends to Doré's studio. Unlike most Englishwomen, this was a very impulsive and irrepressible young person; and she offered the frankest criticism of all the works around. The picture on which Doré was then engaged occupied her attention particularly; and not content with recommending various improvements, she suddenly caught the brush from the artist's hand, and saying coolly, "Don't you think, Mr. Doré, that a touch of this kind would be an improvement there?" she actually altered the artist's work with her own audacious fingers. Her friends were rather astonished, and one of them afterwards took occasion to apologise to him for her impulsiveness. Doré seemed only surprised to find that any apology or explanation should be considered necessary. He thought there was some justice in the suggestion thus practically made, and it seemed to him quite natural that one artist should help another. It did not seem to have occurred to him that there was anything presumptuous in the volunteer effort of the young beginner to lend a helping hand to one of the most celebrated and successful artists of the day. (*Christian Age*.)

Ver. 10. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.—*A just conception of God*:—There are two things which sincere religion can never fail of attaining, one of which is the greatest ingredient—nay, the very foundation of all happiness in this world, and the other is the happiness and immortality which wait for us in the world to come. The latter we can only enjoy now through faith and hope; but the former is present with us, the certain consequence and necessary attendant upon a mind truly virtuous and religious. I mean, the ease and satisfaction of mind which flow from a due sense of God and religion, and the uprightness of our desires and intentions to serve Him. I. A JUST CONCEPTION OF GOD, OF HIS EXCELLENCES AND PERFECTIONS, IS THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF RELIGION. Fear is not a voluntary passion. We cannot be afraid or not afraid of things just as we please. We fear any being in proportion to the power and will which we conceive that being to have either to hurt or to protect us. The different kinds of fear are no otherwise distinguishable from one another than by considering the different conceptions or ideas of the things feared. The fear of a tyrant and the fear of a father are very different passions; but he that knows not the difference between a tyrant and a father will never be able to distinguish these passions. A right and due fear of God presupposes a right and due conception of God. If men misconceive concerning God, either as to His holiness and purity, or to His justice and mercy, their fear of Him will not produce wisdom. The proposition of the text is equivalent to this—a just notion and conception of God is the beginning of wisdom. We experience in ourselves different kinds and degrees of fear, which have very different effects and operations. The fear of the Lord is not an abject, slavish fear; since God is no tyrant. The properties of religious fear, as mentioned in Scripture, are various. It is clean. It is to hate evil. It is a fountain of life. In it is strong confidence. The fear of God signifies that frame and affection of soul which is the consequence of a just notion and conception of the Deity. It is called the fear of God because, as majesty and power are the principal parts of the idea of God, so fear and reverence are the main ingredients in the affection that arises from it. It follows that none should be void of the fear of God, but those who only want right notions of God. II. THE JUST CONCEPTION OF GOD IS THE RIGHT RULE TO FORM OUR JUDGMENTS BY, IN ALL PARTICULAR MATTERS OF RELIGION. Wisdom here means true religion. There is religion which is folly and superstition, that better suits with any other name than that of wisdom. If the fear of God only in a general way shows us the necessity of religion, and leaves us to take our chance in the great variety of forms and institutions that are to be found in the world, it may be our hap to learn folly as well as wisdom, upon the instigation of this principle. But the fear of God further teaches us wherein true religion consists. In natural religion this is evidently the case, because in that state there is no pretence to any other rule that can come into competition with this. It is from the notion of a God that men come to have any sense of religion. When we consider God as lord and governor of the world, we soon perceive ourselves to be in subjection, and that we stand obliged, both in interest and duty, to pay obedience to the Supreme. Take from the notion of God any of the moral perfections that

belong to it, and you will find such alteration must influence religion likewise, which will degenerate in the same proportion as the notion of God is corrupted. The superstitious man, viewing God through the false perspectives of fear and suspicion, loses sight of His goodness, and sees only a dreadful spectre made up of anger and revenge. Hence religion becomes his torment. That only is true religion which is agreeable to the nature of God. Natural religion is the foundation upon which revelation stands, and therefore revelation can never supersede natural religion without destroying itself. The difference between these two is this: in natural religion nothing can be admitted that may not be proved and deduced from our natural notions. Everything must be admitted for some reason. But revelation introduces a new reason, the will of God, which has, and ought to have, the authority of a law with us. As God has authority to make laws, He may add to our duty and obligations as He sees fit. It is not therefore necessary that all parts of a revelation should be proved by natural reason: it is sufficient that they do not contradict it; for the will of God is a sufficient reason for our submission. The essentials of religion, even under revelation, must be tried and judged by the same principle. No revelation can dispense with virtue and holiness. All such doctrines and all such rites and ceremonies as tend to subvert true goodness and holiness are not of God's teaching or introducing. The way to keep ourselves stedfastly in the purity of the gospel is to keep our eye constantly on this rule. Could enthusiasm, or destructive zeal, ever have grown out of the gospel had men compared their practices with the natural sense they have of God? Could religion ever have degenerated into folly and superstition had the true notions of God been preserved, and all religious actions been examined in the light of them? Some, taking religion to be what it appears to be, reject all religion. Could men have judged thus perversely had they attended to the true rule, and formed their notions of religion from the nature and wisdom of God, and not from the follies and extravagances of men? How can the folly and perverseness of others affect your duty to God? How came you absolved from all religion, because others have corrupted theirs? Does the error or ignorance of others destroy the relation between you and God, and make it reasonable for you to throw off all obedience? The fear of God will teach you another sort of wisdom. (*Thomas Sherlock, D.D.*)

The fear of the Lord:—I. THIS PRINCIPLE WILL PREPARE YOU FOR DISCHARGING IN AN ACCEPTABLE MANNER THE DUTIES WHICH YOU OWE MORE IMMEDIATELY TO YOUR MAKER. It is the fear of the Lord alone that can inspire and animate your devotions. The sense of His glorious presence will inspire a higher tone of adoration, will give a deeper humility to your confessions, and add a double fervour to your prayers.

II. THIS PRINCIPLE WILL HAVE A MOST SALUTARY INFLUENCE ON THE WHOLE TENOR OF YOUR CONDUCT. The dictates of reason and conscience, considered as the commands of God, acquire thereby the force of a law; the authority of the lawgiver is respected, and it becomes a powerful motive to obedience. III. BUT WILL NOT THIS FEAR OF THE LORD ABRIDGE THE HAPPINESS OF LIFE? The impression that we act continually under the inspection of an Omniscient Judge—will it not impose a restraint on our conduct? Will it not check the gaiety of our hearts and diffuse a gloom over the whole of our existence? If, indeed, the Almighty were a capricious tyrant, who delighted in the miseries of His creatures, if the fear of the Lord were that servile principle which haunts the minds of the superstitious, then you might complain, with justice, that the yoke of religion was severe. But it is a service of a more liberal kind which the Ruler of the world requires. It is a restraint to which, independently of religion, prudence would admonish you to submit. It is not a restraint from any innocent enjoyment, but from misery and infamy and guilt. (*W. Moodie, D.D.*)

The beginning of wisdom:—This text occurs several times in the Old Testament, showing its importance; and it really sums up the teaching of the Bible for all classes and ages, and is one strikingly adapted for urging upon us the early religious education of our children. I. WHAT IS "THE FEAR OF THE LORD"? 1. The right knowledge of Him in what He is—(1) In creation. (2) In providence. (3) As revealed in His Word. 2. And, consequent upon this—(1) Reverence of Him. (2) Belief in His Word. (3) Love for Him as a Father. (4) Obedience to Him as a Master (*Mal. i. 6*). Mark how a child, as it learns its duty to an earthly parent, is thus trained in its relation to its heavenly Father. II. THIS IS TRUE WISDOM, which means here the knowledge of Divine things, rightly used. When we fear the Lord we are wise, because—1. The heart is then taught by the Holy Ghost. 2. We set a right value on things temporal and eternal. 3. We listen to the words of Jesus and of the Scriptures, and repent and

believe the gospel (Luke x. 42; 2 Tim. iii. 15). 4. We seek to know and carefully follow His holy will (Eph. v. 17). 5. We walk in a sure path of peace and safety (chap. iii. 17). III. BUT OUR TEXT STATES THAT THIS FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM. 1. It is at the root of all true wisdom; for we are never truly wise till we begin here, and only then do we know how to deal rightly with all things. 2. It is only reasonable then, and our solemn and bounden duty, to teach our children these blessed things early. 3. And God has confirmed the truth of the text by making this thoroughly practicable. Mark how the relations and circumstances of a child prepare it for learning: What God is as a Father. What Christ is as a Saviour. What the Holy Ghost is as a Teacher. Also what repentance, faith, obedience, &c., are, and the opposite of all these. Note the parables of Scripture. 4. And the Holy Ghost can reach a child's heart; hence the parent's encouragement to pray, and to use teaching in faith and perseverance. (C. J. Goodhart, M.A.) *True religion the evidence of a good understanding:—* We all naturally desire happiness. We all know that obtaining it greatly depends on a wise choice of our conduct in life; and yet very few examine, with any care, what conduct is likeliest to procure us the felicity that we seek. There is deeply rooted in the heart of man an inbred sense of right and wrong, which, however heedlessly overlooked or studiously suppressed by the gay or the busy part of the world, will from time to time make them both feel that it hath the justest authority to govern all that we do, as well as power to reward with the truest consolation and punish with the acutest remorse. Some see the absolute necessity of bringing virtue and duty into the account when they deliberate concerning the behaviour that leads to happiness; but they affect to set up virtue in opposition to piety, and think to serve the former by deprecating the latter. Perhaps only relatively few venture to deny the existence of a First Cause. If there exists a Sovereign of the universe, almighty and all-wise, it cannot be a matter that we are unconcerned in. He must have intended that we should pay Him those regards which are His due—a proper temperature of fear and love: two affections which ought never to be separated in thinking of God; whichever is expressed implies the other. This is the true wisdom of man. Consider its influence—I. ON THE CONDUCT. God has not planted in us passions, affections, and appetites, to grow up wild as accident directs, but to be diligently superintended, weeded, and pruned, and each confined to its proper bounds. It would both be unjust and unwise to reject the smallest inducement to any part of goodness; for we greatly need every one that we can have. But it is extremely requisite to observe where our chief security lies, and place our chief trust there. The reasonableness, the dignity, the beauty of virtue are doubtless natural, and ought to be strong recommendations of it. No motive, however, is at all times sufficient, excepting only the fear of God, taught as the truth is in Jesus. This is one unchangeable motive, level to the apprehension of every person, extending to the practice of every duty, including at once every moral disposition of heart and every prudent regard to our own good. The fear of God can pierce the inmost recesses of our minds and search the rightness of our most secret desires. Reverence of God's authority will make us fear to injure the meanest of our fellow-creatures, and hope of sharing in His bounty will teach us to imitate it by the tenderest exercise of humanity and compassion. II. WHAT EFFECT THE FEAR OF GOD MUST HAVE ON THE ENJOYMENT OF OUR LIVES. It will make bad people uneasy. It restrains persons from dissolute pleasures. It gives a peculiar seriousness and awe to the minds of men. It moderates the liveliness of over-gay dispositions. As to the sufferings of life, religion prevents many and diminishes the rest. True religion being of such importance, there are some things which may justly be expected of mankind in its favour. 1. That they who have not yet carefully searched into the grounds of it should not take upon them to treat it with scorn or even disregard. 2. It may be expected also that they who profess to examine should do it fairly. 3. They who are so happy as to believe should secure and complete their happiness by what alone can do it—a suitable behaviour. On all accounts, therefore, it is our most important concern to cultivate and express the affections of piety, which are indeed the noblest movements of our souls towards the worthiest object, towards the attainment of the most blessed end. (Archbp. Secker.)

Ver. 11. For by Me thy days shall be multiplied.—*Of the wisdom of being religious:—*No desire is so deeply implanted in our nature as that of preserving and prolonging our life. Life and health are the foundation of all other enjoyments.

The principal point of wisdom in the conduct of human life is so to use the enjoyments of this present world as that they may not themselves shorten that period wherein it is allowed us to enjoy them. Temperance and sobriety, the regular government of our appetites and passions, are the greatest instances of human wisdom. Religion adds strength to these things by annexing the promise of God's immediate blessing to the natural tendency and consequences of things. "The fear of the Lord" and "the knowledge of the Holy" are two synonymous expressions, signifying "the practice of virtue and true religion." I. THE PRACTISE OF RELIGION IS, IN GENERAL, MAN'S TRUEST WISDOM. The whole tenor of Scripture concurs in setting forth the wisdom of being virtuous and religious. Compare with the wisdom in understanding the arts and sciences. Wisdom of men in being able to overreach and defraud each other; wisdom of political skill; wisdom in words and artful representations of things; wisdom in searching out the secrets of nature. The only wisdom that all men are capable of, and that all men are indispensably obliged to attain, is the practical wisdom of being truly religious. II. THE PRACTISE OF RELIGION TENDS TO PROLONG OUR LIFE AND LENGTHEN OUR DAYS. Promises of health and life are frequent in the Old Testament. See the fifth commandment with promise. There are threatenings of the wicked in the Old Testament, which declare their days shall be shortened. In the nature of things men destroy themselves and shorten their days by many kinds of wickedness. According to the same natural order and tendency of things, by peace and charity men are preserved from destruction; by temperance their bodies are maintained in health; by quiet of conscience and satisfaction of mind is a new life added to their spirits. In the positive appointment and constitution of Providence there was yet more assurance of the doctrine. The temporal promises of the Old Testament cannot now be applied with any certainty under the New, where eternal life is so much more clearly revealed. III. HOW IS THIS BLESSING TO BE DESIRED BY CHRISTIANS UNDER THE GOSPEL STATE. The gospel gives a mean notion of the present life and a glorious representation of the happiness of that to come, so that a devout man may wish to be delivered from the miseries of this sinful world. But the best men need prolonged lives on earth for their own amendment and improvement; and if not for their own, for the sake of others. It may also be reminded that duties are entrusted to us, and we must not shirk them. And the longest life here is but a moment in comparison of eternity. We ought to make it the main care of our lives to secure our eternal happiness hereafter; only then do length of days become a blessing. (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) *The criterion of true wisdom:*—The temporal interests of one man are so bound up with those of many others that you can scarcely find the individual of whom it may be said that he plans for himself alone, or acts for himself alone. If we stretch our thoughts from temporal things and fix them on spiritual, will the same thing hold? Hardly perhaps, for we can scarcely suppose that, through destroying his own soul, a man may also destroy the souls of many others. Unto every one amongst us there is vouchsafed a sufficiency of means, so that he who perishes does not perish through being involved in the ruin of another, but through having wrought his own individual destruction. Neither religion nor irreligion can be said to propagate themselves, as industry and idleness in temporal things. Religion, in the most emphatic sense, is a thing between each of us and God. I. THE CRITERION OF WISDOM. If a man be wise at all, he is wise for himself. The prime object of every class of society is the advancing its own interests. Men are set down as wise chiefly in proportion as practical results shall prove them to have been wise for themselves. Nevertheless, unless the wisdom have a heavenly character it cannot in any degree render the possessor truly wise for himself. If I be wise for myself I must be wise by making provision for the vast expansion of my being, and not by limiting attention to that period which is nothing but its outset. He cannot be wise for himself who dishonours himself, who degrades himself, who destroys himself. Can a man be pronounced to have been wise for himself before whose tomb a nation may be burning its incense of gratitude for his discoveries, whilst his spirit is brooding in darkness, and silence, and anguish over the vast infatuation which caused God to be forgotten whilst science is pursued? A man may be wise in all that the world calls wisdom, and yet in no sense wise for himself. Unless a man has been wise for eternity he has not been wise for himself. Only that wisdom which is from above, the wisdom which consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, can make a man truly wise. II. THE ADVANTAGE OF POSSESSING THIS WISDOM IS ALTOGETHER PERSONAL. So far as the present life is concerned the consequences of the

possession or non-possession of wisdom are not confined to the individual himself. The words of Solomon had respect to the future rather than to the present. The future consequences are altogether personal. From this flows the final woe of the impenitent. A terrible punishment is solitary confinement. There may be solitariness in hell. "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *The gain of the wise*:—I apply this text to the all-absorbing and vitally important matter—evangelical religion. It may be paraphrased thus: He that is truly wise, will find it to his own personal everlasting advantage; it is his interest as well as his duty to be made wise unto salvation; but he who scorns religion will find his scorning eventually infinitely to his disadvantage. I. THE DECIDED SUBJECTION OF THE HEART TO GOD IS THE ONLY TRUE WISDOM. It is wisdom in the abstract. It is wisdom contrasted with every other acquisition. By religion is meant faith in Jesus Christ. Religion is a vague term which may be applied to that which is true, that which is false, and that which is formal. I mean by it, that faith in Jesus Christ which is the entire submission of the heart to Him, and a practical devotedness of the life to His service. This is not only wisdom in the abstract, but wisdom of a peculiar, personal, individual importance. II. HE WHO ACCOMPLISHES THIS IS AN INFINITE GAINER. 1. He gains the possession of the elements of present happiness. If the possession of a truly religious character does not in its own nature exempt an individual from the calamities of life, it does what is, on the whole, far more effectual and more elevating to his character—it enables him to bear them. 2. He gains the prospect of a saved eternity. The truly converted man is the only being on the face of the earth who has a rational hold upon the blessedness of heaven. III. HE WHO SCORNS RELIGION IS AN INFINITE LOSER. To scorn is to despise religion; to scoff at, to ridicule, to reject, to neglect it. He who will not repent is a scorner. He who puts off the concerns of religion is a scorner. He who is self-righteous is a scorner. Whatever the scorner is to bear, he is to bear alone. 1. He is to bear his own sins. The Christian's sins have been borne by the Saviour in whom he trusts. The scorner has relinquished all claims upon the precious Saviour and His promises; he consents to bear the weight of his own sin. 2. He has to bear the weight of his own sorrows. The scorner throws by the precious balm of Gilead. He may take the miserable comfort of bending to the stroke of necessity, but it is a satisfaction filled with secret repinings and sorrows of the heart. 3. Look at this matter in relation to eternity. The scorner will bear the scorn of heaven and of hell. 4. The scorner will bear his own eternal self-reproaches. If there is any one thing on earth more difficult to endure than another, it is the accusation of a man's own conscience. The mental anguish of consciously-deserved distress is intolerable. (*G. T. Bedell, D.D.*) But if thou scornest, thou alone shalt bear it.—*The advantages of a tractable person*:—I. THE BENEFIT WHICH ENSUES FROM HEARKENING TO GOOD COUNSEL. 1. The title or denomination of a tractable person. He is a "wise man." It is a part of wisdom for a man to suspect his own wisdom, and to think that it is possible for him to deceive himself. It is a part of wisdom to discern between good and evil—to know what is to be left and what is to be embraced. It is a part of wisdom to know one's best friends, and to give them all encouragement of being further friendly to us by hearkening to their counsel. 2. The benefit that accrues unto this wise man. He is wise unto himself. This wisdom redounds to a man's own furtherance and account. He is much better for it every way. Wise for thyself—in thy inward man; in thine outward man, thy body and estate; in thy relations: there is no better way of providing for those who belong to thee than by labouring to walk in good ways. No man serves God in vain. This is true for this life and for the life to come. God bestows graces and rewards them. God has involved our own good in His glory, so that while we endeavour to promote the one we advance the other. We are no further wise ourselves than we are wise for our own souls. II. THE INCONVENIENCE OF THE NEGLECT OF GOOD COUNSEL. The simple inconvenience: "Bear his scorning." Scorners are such as have but mean thoughts of religion. Such as decline it for themselves. Such as deride and scoff at it. The grounds of scorning are unbelief, pride and self-conceit, thralldom and addiction to any particular lust. Scorning is surely followed by punishment, and in the expression "thou shalt bear it" is indicated the indefiniteness, the universality, and the unavoidable nature of the punishment. Scorners persist in sin, and thus aggravate it so much the more to themselves. Scorners undervalue the kindness of reproof, and slight the motions of God's Spirit in them. Beware, then, of the sin of scorning! (*T. Horton, D.D.*)

The profit of Wisdom.—She shows that she aims not at any emolument or profit of her own, but at the good of others, to whom she directs her precepts, and by keeping of them from miseries which otherwise they shall inevitably suffer. **I. OUR WISDOM PROFITS NOT JESUS CHRIST, NOR DOETH OUR SCORNING HURT HIM.** Because no man can make God wiser, holier, or happier. He is above all scorns. He needs not our approbation. He can raise up others that shall honour Him more than we can dishonour Him. **II. OUR WISDOM MAY PROFIT OURSELVES.** It may make men happy. 1. It brings profit to us in regard of our credit. All states reverence and prefer wise men. 2. In regard of means. Wise men ordinarily thrive in all trades. 3. It is profitable to the body and preserveth life. 4. It is profitable to the soul. It preserveth it from destruction. **III. OUR SCORNING HURTS OURSELVES.** 1. Because it frustrates the means of our salvation. Who will regard that word which he scorns? 2. It gives God just cause of our condemnation. No man will endure his word should be scorned, much less will God. (*F. Taylor, B.D.*)

The superiority of religion over infidelity.—In the language of Solomon, to be wise is to be religious, and this language is at once correct and comprehensive. That alone deserves the name of wisdom which embraces all the important interests of man, and which reaches, in its effects, through the whole extent of his rational existence. True philosophy consists in a practical acquaintance with our duties and destination as rational and immortal beings, and in rendering this acquaintance subservient to the regulation of our affections and habits, so as to promote every virtuous disposition, and thus to prepare the soul for a state of purer and more dignified enjoyment. This is not only to be truly wise, but to be wise for ourselves. That is not properly a man's own for the possession of which he has no permanent security. It is the peculiar excellence of religion that whilst it detracts nothing from the virtuous satisfactions which arise from honourable labour in any sphere of life, it superadds the consciousness of Divine favour. Much has been said and written of the tendency of mere moral virtue, independently of religious hopes, to make men happy. Whatever promotes self-government and temperance, and thus restrains those excesses which are inimical to health and peace, is wise; but this is not being wise for ourselves upon the best plan. It leaves out the animating considerations which religion alone can furnish. Here lies the superiority of religious wisdom. Besides all the sources of pleasure which are common to the Christian with the man of the world, it opens others of its own by furnishing objects of research to the understanding and interest to the heart infinitely more excellent and durable than any to which mere worldly wisdom can pretend. Can he, then, be wise for himself who prefers the plan of worldly wisdom to that wisdom which is from above? What is there of life or of joy in this wretched philosophy that should gain it so many proselytes? What should we gain by following their example? We might be flattered by empty praise as being unusually wise. If you care for such honour, it is of easy acquisition. You have only to deny your God and renounce your expectations from futurity, and it is done. But if you inquire what you will get in return, there are none to answer you. Let the advocates of unbelief estimate the advantages of their system as high as they please above ours, yet will that advantage dwindle into insignificance in the eye of true wisdom when the remotest probability of future account becomes a part of the computation. And where are such advantages to be found? And what must you lose in order to gain them? But they say, "Truth is wisdom; and truth must be supported, be the consequences what they may." But is their so-called truth more than opinion? And every probability is on the side of the being of God and dependence of humanity on Him. Can there be wisdom, for ourselves or for others, in renouncing the cheering views of Christianity for the dreary systems of infidelity? (*Jas. Lindsay, D.D.*)

The danger of not complying with the gospel-call.—This verse is the epilogue or conclusion of the gospel-treaty with sinners. The entertainment the gospel meets with is twofold, and there are two sorts of gospel-hearers: compliers with the gospel-call; these are called the wise: refusers; these are styled scorers. **I. IF THOU BE NO COMPLIER WITH THE GOSPEL-CALL THOU ART A SCORNER OF IT: there is no middle course.** Thou art not a complier with the gospel-call as long as—

1. Thou entertainest any prejudice against religion and wilt not come to Christ.
2. Thou art in a doubt whether to come or not, or delayest and putteth off.
3. If thou dost come, but dost not turn from thy sins unto God in Christ sincerely, thoroughly, and universally, thou dost not comply. By not complying with the gospel-call thou abusest the mercy, goodness, and patience of God. Thou lookest on the gospel-call as a trifling, inconsiderable thing. Thou exposeth it to shame

and dishonour. Thou failest of thy fair promises. Thou makest thyself merry with thy disobedience to this call. Is not that scorning? II. IF THOU COMPLY WITH THE GOSPEL-CALL THOU SHALT THEREIN ACT WISELY FOR THYSELF. The profit descends to themselves; it does not ascend to God. To confirm this, consider—1. God is infinite in perfections, self-sufficient, and therefore the creatures can add nothing to Him. 2. All the goodness and profitableness of men or angels, or any creatures, can add nothing to Him. But by complying thou shalt advance thine own interest. (T. Boston.)

Vers. 13-15. A foolish woman is clamorous.—*The foolish woman* :—This might be understood, in all truth, of the “strange woman” with her enticements; but I am strongly inclined to interpret the passage of Folly as an allegorical personage set in contrast with Wisdom—Folly under all the forms and phases which it assumes in the world; all being included under this personification that entices from the gates of that house where Wisdom receives and entertains her guests. The characteristics of this second personage are the reverse of those of Wisdom. They are ignorance and thoughtless emptiness: what is wanting in solid and substantial ideas is made up by loud clamour and noisy importunity. She, too, hath builded her house. She, too, hath provided her entertainment. She, too, invites her guests. The houses are over against each other—on opposite sides of the way. Wisdom’s is on the right hand; Folly’s on the left. They are thus in the vicinity of each other; it being the very purpose of Folly to prevent, by her allurements, those who pass by from entering the doors of Wisdom. Each addresses her invitations, and uses—but from very different motives—every art of persuasion. Folly presents all her captivating allurements to the lusts and passions of corrupt nature; and she shows her skill in seduction by holding out, in promise, the secret enjoyment of forbidden sweets. There are pleasures in sin. It is from these that its temptations arise. Alas! Folly has the heart of man wholly on her side. (R. Wardlaw.)

Ver. 14. For she sitteth at the door of her house.—*The ministry of temptation* :—

I. AS CONDUCTED BY DEPRAVED WOMAN. A foolish woman is here the emblem of wickedness in the world. 1. She is ignorant. Blind to spiritual realities and claims. She is in the kingdom of darkness. 2. She is clamorous. Full of noise and excitement; bearing down all objections to her entreaties. 3. She is audacious. Modesty, which is the glory of a woman’s nature, has left her. 4. She is persuasive. She admits that her pleasures are wrong, and on that account more delectable. II. AS DIRECTED TO THE INEXPERIENCED IN LIFE. To whom does she especially direct her entreaties? Not to the mature saint stalwart in virtue. She calls “passengers,” the “simple ones.” III. AS TENDING TO A MOST MISERABLE DESTINATION. The ministry of temptation is very successful as conducted by depraved woman. 1. This woman obtained guests. 2. Her guests were ruined. 3. Her guests were ruined contrary to their intention. (Homilist.) *The pleasures of sin* :—One of the foul spirits that assail and possess men is singled out and delineated, and this one represents a legion in the background. This is no fancy picture. It is drawn from life. The plague is as rampant in our streets as it is represented to be in the Proverbs. Mankind have sat for the picture; there is no mistake in the outline, there is no exaggeration in the colouring. Let no youth ever once, or for a moment, go where he would be ashamed to be found by his father and his mother. This woman is the figure of all evil—the devil, the world, the flesh, whatever form they may assume and whatever weapons they may employ. The one evil spirit, dragged forth from the legion and exposed, is intended not to conceal, but to open up the generic character of the company. In this life every human being is placed between two rival invitations, and every human being in this life yields to the one or to the other. The power of sin lies in its pleasure. If stolen waters were not sweet, none would steal the waters. This is part of the mystery in which our being is involved by the fall. Our appetite is diseased. In man fallen there is a diseased relish for that which destroys. There is an appetite in our nature which finds sweetness in sin. And the appetite grows by what it feeds on. It is only in the mouth that the stolen water is sweet; afterwards it is bitter. One part of the youth’s danger lies in his ignorance: “He knoweth not that the dead are there.” (W. Arnot, D.D.)

Ver. 15. To call passengers who go right on their ways.—*The tempted ones* :—Who are the tempted? Young people who have been well-educated; these shall will triumph most in being the ruin of. I. WHAT THEIR REAL CHARACTER IS.

"Passengers that go right on their ways"; that have been trained up in the paths of religion and virtue, and set out very hopefully and well; that seemed determined and designed for good, and are not (as that young man in chap. vii. 8) "going the way to her house." Such as these she has a design upon, and lays snares for, and uses all her arts, all her charms, to pervert them; if they go right on, and will not look toward her, she will call after them, so urgent are these temptations. II. **How THE FOOLISH WOMAN REPRESENTS THEM.** She calls them "simple" and "wanting understanding," and therefore courts them to her school, that they may be cured of the restraints and formalities of their religion. This is the method of the stage, where the sober young man that has been virtuously educated is the fool in the play, and the plot is to make him seven times more a child of hell than his profane companions, under colour of polishing and refining him, and setting him up for a wit and a beau. What is justly charged upon sin and impiety (ver. 4) that it is folly, is here very unjustly retorted upon the ways of virtue; but the day will declare who are the fools. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Vers. 17, 18. **But he knoweth not that the dead are there.**—*The fatal banquet*:—Here two texts. Preach concerning a couple of preachers; one by usurpation, the other by assignation: the world's chaplain, and the Lord's prophet. First, the delightfulness of sin; second, converted Solomon. The text of the one is from hell's *scriptum est*. The text of the other is the word of eternal truth. We are here presented with a banquet. The inviter is a degenerate woman, representing sin—such as ambition, pride, engrossing, bribery, faction, riot, oppression. The cheer is presented in several dishes—waters, stolen, secret; bread, eaten in secret, pleasant. Sins may be in some sense likened to waters. 1. Water is an enemy to digestion. 2. Water dulls the brain. 3. Grace is compared to fire, gracelessness to water. 4. Water is a baser element, as it were, sophisticate with transfusion. 5. Physicians say that water is a binder. On the other hand—(1) Waters mundify and cleanse; but these soil and infect. (2) Waters quench the thirst, and cool the heat of the body; but these rather fire the heart and inflame the affections. (3) We say of water, "It is a good servant, though an ill master"; but we cannot apply this to sin. It is not good at all; indeed, less ill when it serves than when it reigns. The nature of these waters is not more pernicious than their number is numerous. The first course of these waters are such sins as more immediately rob God. Atheism is the highest theft against God, because it would steal from Him, not His goods, but Himself. Heresy soon tickles the brain, and makes a man drunk. This sin robs God of His truth. Sacrilege robs God of His goods. Faction robs God of His order and peace. Profaneness robs God of His glory. The second sort of stolen waters are those sins which mediate rob God, immediately our brethren, depriving them of some comfort or right which the inviolable law of God hath interested them to—such as irreverence, murder, adultery, thievery, slander, flattery. The third sort of stolen waters—sins which immediately rob ourselves—such as pride, epicurism, idleness, envy, drunkenness, covetousness. Stolen—in this consists the approbation of their sweetness, that they come by stealth, and are compassed by dangerous and forbidden pains. A second argument of their sweetness is their cheapness. What a man gets by robbery comes without cost. A third argument is derived from our corrupt affections. Sin pleaseth the flesh. The other service at this banquet is bread; bread of secreties, bread of pleasure. Bread implies much health, great comforts, fulness of all requisite good things. Since the devil will put the form of bread upon his tempting wickedness, let us examine what kind of bread it is. The seed is corruption; the influences that ripen the seed are temptations; when ripe it is cut down by the sickle of the devil's subtlety; it is threshed out with the flail of his strength; the flood of concupiscence drives the mill that grinds it. The mill consists of two stones—pleasure and profit. The leaven is the colourable and fallacious arguments that persuade the sweetness of this bread. The oven that bakes it is our own evil affections. It is called "bread of secrecy." Unjust things love privacy. But God sees. Satan's guests unhappily come from the end of a feast to the beginning of a fray. All sinful joys are dammed up with a "but." The devil does but cozen the wicked with his cates. The punishments of the wicked are most usually in the like; proper and proportional to their offences. The perdition that follows the feast of sin destroys a man in his goods, in his good name, in his health, in his soul. The tempted are called the dead. There are three kinds of death—corporal, spiritual, eternal. Corporal, when the body leaves this life; spiritual, when the soul forsakes and is forsaken of grace; eternal, when both shall

be thrown into hell. The text has also the attempted, the new guest whom sin strives to bring in to the rest. He is described by his ignorance: "Knoweth not." Five kinds of ignorance: human, natural, affected, invincible, proud. The place of the banquet is the "depths of hell." This amplifies the misery of the guests in three circumstances. 1. Their weakness: they are soon in. 2. The place: hell. 3. The unrecoverableness of it: the depth of hell. By hell is meant the deep bondage of wicked souls, Satan having by sin a full dominion over their consciences. (T. Adams.)

Ver. 18. *Her guests are in the depths of hell.—Whose guests shall we be?—It is through blindness and inconsideration that any man is entangled in the snares of the foolish woman. We are naturally starving creatures, and cannot find happiness within ourselves. As every man must have food to satisfy the natural cravings of hunger, so every soul must have some gratification to the desires of happiness. Wisdom and Folly do each spread a leash for men. The question is, Whose guests shall we be? And did we possess any wisdom, or any true and well-directed self-love, it might be easily decided. The entertainments of Wisdom are soul-quickening provision. They that hear her calls shall eat that which is good, and their souls shall live for ever. The guests of Wisdom are in the heights of heaven. They feast on the hidden manna, and on the fruits of the tree of life. The provisions of the foolish woman are a deadly, though perhaps a slow, poison. Her guests have their portion with the wicked giants who brought on the world a universal deluge, and with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, who are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. Let us consider where Joseph now is, and what blessings are come upon the crown of the head of him who so bravely resisted temptations the most alluring and the most threatening. Let us, on the other hand, remember Sodom and Gomorrah. (G. Lawson.)*

CHAPTER X.

VER. 1. *A wise son maketh a glad father.—A son's wisdom a father's joy:—*The first proverb is a characteristic specimen of its kind. It is in your power to make your father glad, and God expects you to do it. Here is one of the sweetest fruits of wisdom—a son's wisdom is his father's joy. A son who breaks his mother's heart—can this earth have any more irksome load to bear? Foolish son! it is not your mother only with whom you have to deal. God put it into her heart to love you, to watch over you night and day, to bear with all your waywardness, to labour for you to the wasting of her own life. All this is God's law in her being. Her Maker and yours knew that by putting these instincts into her nature for your good He was laying on her a heavy burden. But He is just. He intended that she should be repaid. His system provides compensation for outlay. There are two frailties—a frailty of infancy and a frailty of age. God has undertaken, in the constitution of His creatures, to provide for both. Where are His laws of compensation written? One on the fleshy table of the heart, the other on the table of the ten commandments. He who knows what is in man would not confide to instinct the care of an aged parent. For that He gave distinct command. There is the mother's title to her turn of cherishing. You dare not dispute her right, and you cannot withstand her Avenger. (W. Arnot, D.D.) *Parental solicitude:—*This arises—I. FROM THE IMPERFECTION OF PARENTS ON THEIR OWN PARTS. We all want our children to avoid our faults. Children are very apt to be echoes of the parental life. II. FROM OUR CONSCIOUS INEFFICIENCY AND UNWISDOM OF DISCIPLINE. Out of twenty parents there may be one who understands how thoroughly and skilfully to discipline. We, nearly all of us, are on one side or on the other. The discipline is an entire failure in many houses because the father pulls one way and the mother pulls the other way. To strike the medium between severity and too great leniency is the anxiety of every intelligent parent. III. FROM THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDISH SINFULNESS. IV. BECAUSE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO MANY TEMPTATIONS. (T. De Witt Talmage.) *The influence of the child's character upon the parent's heart:—*I. THE HOLY CHARACTER OF A CHILD GLADDENS THE HEART OF A PARENT. 1. He sees in it the

best results of his training. 2. The best guarantee for his son's happiness. II. THE UNHOLY CHARACTER OF A CHILD SADDENS THE HEART OF A PARENT. Especially a mother. All her toils, anxieties, have been fruitless. A heavy cloud lies on her soul. (*Homilist*.) A foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.—*The mother's sorrow* :—The word "heaviness" means, in this connection, sadness, sorrow, dejection of mind, a wounded spirit, a broken heart. "Foolishness" denotes, not merely an intellectual weakness, nor merely a religious want, but in general, any grand moral deficiency in the whole complex economy of character.

I. THE YOUNG MAN NEGLECTFUL OF HIS INTELLECTUAL CULTURE. In all the infinite range of being, after you leave the irrational, until you reach the Divine, there is none whose "education is finished." Every young man ought to be giving diligent heed to his intellectual development and discipline. The word "foolishness" here is the antithesis, not of "learning," but of "wisdom"—two very different things. Learning, in its profoundness, is not possible to all young men. Education, *i.e.*, education—a drawing forth, a development. Not a mind infused with erudition, but a mind led forth to think. As thinking is hard work, and most men are lazy, few willingly think. They prefer to buy thought. A true mother's first thought is her child's education. This, however, often errs sadly, in undue forcing, or in undue attention to merely light literature. II. THE INDOLENT YOUNG MAN. 1. The man who has no regular business. The young man of inherited wealth, or the poor young man who has neither energy nor ambition to rise. 2. The man who, having a business, does not attend to it. (1) In some cases this results from sheer indolence. The man has no bone or sinew in him, no instinct of effort, no adaptation for work. Among men of strong hands he is simply a mistake. (2) In other cases this results from a wrong choice of business. The man got into a sphere for which he had no adaptation either mental or physical. Men are everywhere out of place, maladjusted, and so they fail. And by this first failure some men are hopelessly discouraged. (3) In other cases this results from false theories of success. The man is a believer in good luck and grand chances. He trusts to fortune and waits for opportunity. (4) In other cases the failure results from divided application and energy. The man attempts too much. Ignoring the principle of a division of labour as the grand law of civilisation, he affects the practical barbarism of attempting to do everything. Every efficient thing God ever made does its own work always, and its own work only. Life is too short for the accomplishment of great tasks with divided energies. Be the reason of the failure what it may, the world is full of men who, with a business to do, never succeed in it. Life swarms with indolent and inefficient men. And all such sons are a heaviness to their mother. Mothers want their sons to be something and to do something. III. THE YOUNG MAN WHO SELECTS A WRONG BUSINESS OR PURSUES IT WITH A WRONG SPIRIT. The grand aim to-day is to get rich speedily. The practical theory is that all business is honourable in proportion to its revenues; but never was a theory more false. All honest business is equally honourable. The young man should engage in no work requiring the slightest violation of a dictate of conscience. Evil work may have large revenues, but such success is simply infamous. The man who wins it thus is a disgrace to his generation. Woman's nature is alive with lofty and chivalrous sentiments. A son's spotless honour is his mother's glory. IV. THE YOUNG MAN WHO MAKES CHOICE OF UN-PRINCIPLED, IMMORAL, IRRELIGIOUS COMPANIONS. Choose your companions as you would if they were to go in daily to your mother's fireside. Beware of the young man of fashion. Beware of the sceptical young man. There are those who think freely and speak freely of human nature and of religion—Freethinkers. Beware of the young man of practical immorality. He is a sharper in business, untruthful, a Sabbath-breaker, a profane swearer, a quarreller; his associations are with fast men; he has no reputation for purity. V. THE YOUNG MAN WHO HAS BECOME EVIL HIMSELF. It seems impossible that, coming from a happy Christian home, any young man should ever go so widely astray. But alas! the strange thing happens. We see it every day. What a fearful "heaviness" this brings to a mother's heart. Parental love becomes agony when a child turns to evil courses. To save you from this dire moral pestilence a parent would gladly lay down life. VI. THE YOUNG MAN WHO LIVES IN NEGLECT OF PERSONAL RELIGION. To Solomon "wisdom" in its last analysis is personal piety, and "foolishness" is practical irreligion. You may sneer at religion and think it noble and wise to call yourself infidel. Your mother does not. To her religion is a life and power. Surely an impenitent son is a "heaviness" to his mother. (*C. Wadsworth*.) *The young man's*

progress :—In these verses you may make out a sort of successive parallel history of two human beings from the cradle to the grave. I. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN AT HOME.** Children at home. Character begins to be developed very soon. Very little boys may sometimes indicate those tempers and dispositions which, upon the one side shall make the father's heart "glad," or on the other, fill the mother with "heaviness." II. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN GOING OUT** (ver. 5). The great lesson from this verse is, the importance of taking time by the forelock, using advantages when we have them. It does not do to neglect advantages; seize upon them, use them, do everything in its season. Two things young men should not do: they should neither anticipate nor procrastinate. III. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN GETTING ON.** They are now men in business for themselves, having their own responsibilities. Here is an infallible rule: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." Two kinds of slackness of hand: he may do the thing half-asleep, carelessly; he may not keep tight hold on the profits. The man who works with vigour and with thought, whose whole soul and mind and heart work, as well as his hand—he understands the price at which his profits are obtained. IV. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN IN RELATION TO SUCCESS.** "Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivereth from death." Two men may get rich—the one by wickedness, trickery, wrong; the other by industry, probity, diligence. "Righteousness" here probably signifies "benevolence," "beneficence." The property of the man who is selfish and covetous will do him no good. Riches may be the means of grace as well as anything else. The beneficent man looks at his wealth as a thing which is to be used for God. V. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN IN RELATION TO CHANGE.** In the alteration of circumstance, in misfortune, what a difference there is between the fall of a man who has a thorough character and that of a man who has not. VI. **THESE TWO YOUNG MEN IN RELATION TO THE END.** "Blessings are upon the head of the just, but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked." The wicked here means the flagrantly wicked. When the just man grows old he is crowned with respect and love; but the wicked old man receives "violence." The same people, exasperated, unable to bear him any longer, "cover his mouth" and put him out of the way. There is no spectacle on earth so painful as that of a wicked old man. VII. **NOW FOR THE EPITAPH.** "The memory of the just is blessed, but the name of the wicked shall rot." The memory of just parents is better than a fortune to the children. The very name of the wicked shall become putrid and offensive. The two great principles which rightly tone the fortunes of the young man are, willingness to learn and uprightness of walking. Everything must be done "uprightly." (T. Binney.) *Foolish sons* :—I never can forget my interview with a widowed mother who sent for me to counsel with her over her only son, who for the first time had been brought home by a policeman and laid helpless in the hall. It was the adder's first sting in a mother's heart. I said, "This is the turning-point of your boy's life: harshness now will ruin him; love him now more than ever." Said she, "He is penitent this morning, and says it shall be the last time." It was not. Such first times are seldom last times. The burden grew heavier, till at last the mother's prayer moved the Hand to move the heart, and he was plucked as a brand from the burning and brought into the fold of Christ. And it is not only the drunken or debauched son that lies heavy on the mother's heart. Sin leads to other follies and breeds other griefs. When I see a young man who has superior advantages for culture wandering into low companionship, pitching his household tent over against Sodom, I say, "There is a foolish son who will be the heaviness of his mother." When I see beardless self-conceit talking about the scientific scepticism of the day, and pretending to Rationalism and doubts about God's Book and the Cross of Christ, and scoffing at what the Isaac Newtons and the Luthers and Wesleys and Chalmers bowed down before with overawed spirit—sneering at the faith once delivered to the saints—I predict a career that will be a heaviness to the mother. (T. L. Cuyler, D.D.)

Ver. 2. **Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivereth from death.**—*The profits of wickedness and of righteousness* :—In nothing is our common proneness to self-deception more conspicuously manifested than in the erroneous estimate which we form respecting this world and the next. Of the one we think as though it could never have an end; of the other as though it could never have a beginning. I. **THE TREASURES OF WICKEDNESS PROFIT NOTHING.** "Treasures of wickedness" should mean wealth which has been acquired by

dubious or unjustifiable methods, or which is applied to unhallowed or forbidden purposes. But it may be used to signify all wealth bearing no relation to the command and will of the Almighty; all wealth in the acquisition and expenditure of which religion has no influence. But take the present life only, and appearances are against the statement of this text. What will not riches do and obtain for men! Some things they will not. They cannot give health to the languid, ease to the tormented, nor life to the dead. Therefore, with all their fair appearances, they profit nothing. They bring with them no solid, substantial happiness; no joy upon which the soul can confidently repose itself; no strength to endure trials in adversity. If they could, we have still to keep in mind that man is destined for an eternal existence, and for him the hour is coming in which all must confess that riches are useless—nothing in the sight of immortal man, much less in the sight of an eternal God. II. WHAT IS MEANT BY RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND IN WHAT SENSE IT DELIVERETH FROM DEATH. The righteousness which delivereth from death is not our own righteousness properly so-called, but the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness, however, involves a righteousness of our own, which is, in its nature, a necessary fruit, and without which it cannot really exist. The righteousness adverted to by Solomon, in the case of the Jews, was first a ceremonial and then a meritorious righteousness. For us there is first an imputation of the perfect righteousness of Christ, and secondly, an actual righteousness of our own; the first being the cause of our justification, and the second its natural and necessary consequence. The righteous man is he who has accepted the salvation of Christ, is in the leading of the Holy Spirit, and has the testimony of his conscience that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, he daily labours to combine a holy life with a humble and contrite heart. Such a righteousness delivers, not from bodily death, but from all those evils that are represented by, and consummated in, death. To disappointment religion opposes hope; to suffering, patience; to the loss of earthly friends, the friendship of One who "sticketh closer than a brother." In the hour of calamity, disease, and death itself, righteousness is proved to be the only lasting, sustaining remedy. (*Thomas Dale, M.A.*) *Treasures of wickedness* may mean either treasures wickedly got or treasures wickedly spent, or both. Such treasures profit nothing unto the bestowment of true happiness. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Wealth*:—No moral system is complete which does not treat with clearness and force the subject of wealth. The material possessions of an individual or of a nation are, in a certain sense, the prerequisites of all moral life. The production of wealth, if not, strictly speaking, a moral question itself, presses closely upon all other moral questions. Wisdom will be called upon to direct the energies which produce wealth, and to determine the feelings with which we are to regard the wealth which is produced. Moral problems mightier still begin to emerge when the question of distribution presents itself. If production is in a sense the presupposition of all moral and spiritual life, no less certainly correct moral conceptions—may we not even say, true spiritual conditions?—are the indispensable means of determining distribution. In our own day this question of the distribution of wealth stands in the front rank of practical questions. Religious teachers must face it. Socialists are grappling with this question not altogether in a religious spirit. But all socialism is not revolutionary. In the teaching of the Book of Proverbs on this subject note—I. ITS FRANK AND FULL RECOGNITION THAT WEALTH HAS ITS ADVANTAGES AND POVERTY ITS DISADVANTAGES. There is no Quixotic attempt to overlook, as many moral and spiritual systems do, the perfectly obvious facts of life. The extravagance and exaggeration which led St. Francis to choose poverty as his bride find no more sanction in this ancient wisdom than in the sound teaching of our Lord and His apostles. As poverty is a legitimate subject of dread, there are urgent exhortations to diligence and thrift, quite in accordance with the excellent apostolic maxim, that if a man will not work he shall not eat; while there are forcible statements of the things which tend to poverty and of the courses which result in comfort and wealth. II. BUT, MAKING ALL ALLOWANCE FOR THE ADVANTAGES OF WEALTH, WE HAVE TO NOTICE SOME OF ITS SERIOUS DRAWBACKS. To begin with, it is always insecure. If wealth has been obtained in any other way than by honest labour it is useless, at any rate for the owner, and indeed worse than useless for him. There is wealth of another kind, wealth consisting in moral and spiritual qualities, compared with which wealth, as it is usually understood, is quite paltry and unsatisfying. A little wisdom, a little sound understanding, or a little wholesome knowledge, is more precious than wealth. III. POSITIVE COUNSELS ABOUT MONEY AND ITS ACQUISITION. We are cautioned against the fever of

money-getting; we are counselled to exercise a generous liberality in the disposal of such things as are ours. Happy would that society be in which all men were aiming, not at riches, but merely at a modest competency, dreading the one extreme as much as the other. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *The worthlessness of a wicked man's wealth, the value of a righteous man's character*.—I. THE WORTHLESSNESS OF A WICKED MAN'S WEALTH. It will "profit nothing." The wicked man gets treasures here, and often, indeed, the more wicked a man is the more he succeeds. The fool of the gospel became rich. But of what real profit is wealth to the wicked? It feeds and clothes him well as an animal. It may give him gorgeous surroundings. 1. It "profits him" nothing in the way of making him truly happy. It cannot harmonise those elements of his nature which sin has brought into conflict; it cannot remove the sense of fault from his conscience; it cannot fill him with a bright hope for the future. 2. It "profits him" nothing in the way of obtaining the true love of his fellow-men. Men take off their hats to the wealthy, but there is no genuine reverence and love where there is not the recognition of goodness. 3. It "profits him" nothing in the dying hour or in the future world. He leaves it all behind. Money was the curse of Judas. II. THE VALUE OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN'S CHARACTER. The righteous shall be delivered from death, from that which is the very essence in the evil of physical death—the sting of sin; and entirely from spiritual death. The soul of the righteous shall never famish. On the contrary, it shall increase in vigour for ever. There is no want to them that fear Him. (*Homilist.*) *What money cannot do*.—A millionaire who had been born a poor boy, and whose money had become his idol, was showing his house and grounds to a Quaker. The genial Friend praised them and said it was all wonderfully beautiful. "The almighty dollar has done it all," said the millionaire. "What cannot money do?" The Quaker looked sadly at him. He said, "Thy question reminds me of the people in the desert. They bowed down to the golden calf and said it was that which brought them out of Egypt. As it turned out it hindered them and kept them out of the promised land. It would be an awful thing if thy gold kept thee out of heaven. You say, 'What cannot money do?' It cannot deliver thy soul."

Ver. 3. *The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish.*—*The Lord and the righteous*.—I. GOD HAS BOUNTIFULLY PROVIDED EVEN FOR THE UNGODLY. Has He shown such concern for the wicked as to provide for them in the gospel "a feast of fat things full of marrow," and will He disregard the righteous? II. GOD IS PECULIARLY INTERESTED IN THE WELFARE OF THE RIGHTEOUS. The righteous are God's "peculiar treasure above all people." III. GOD HAS PLEDGED HIS WORD THAT THEY SHALL NEVER WANT ANYTHING THAT IS GOOD. Exceeding numerous, great and precious are the promises which God has given to His people. He may seem to leave His people in straits, but it shall be only for the more signal manifestation of His love and mercy towards them. 1. A word of reproof. Many do not make their profiting to appear as they ought. 2. A word of consolation. Some may put away from them this promise under the idea that they are not of the character to whom it belongs. (*Skeletons of Sermons.*) *The famishing of the soul*.—It is of temporal supplies the wise man is here speaking. The "famishing of the soul" might be understood, with great truth, of the proper and peculiar life of the soul. But the connection demands a different interpretation. Soul is often used to signify the "person" and the "animal life." It may have reference to that weakness and fainting of spirit which is the result of the corporeal exhaustion produced by the extremity of want. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 4. *The hand of the diligent maketh rich.*—*Diligent*.—Our life is dependent on our industry. It is good for man that he should have to labour. Were God to do all, we should truly leave Him to do it, not caring to co-operate with the Divine Husbandman in the culture of the field of life. By the "diligent" we are to understand the nimble-handed—those who are active and agile, who will lose nothing for want of rising early and peering about in the darkness if they may but catch a glimpse even of an outline of things. The persons referred to in the text are those who take account of microscopic matters—they are particular about the smallest coins, about moments and minutes, about so-called secondary engagements and plans. The true business man lives in the midst of his business. We are not far from the sanctuary of God when we are listening to such proverbs as these. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Idleness and industry*.—I. THE HAND OF THE ONE IS "DILIGENT,"

THE OTHER IS "SLACK." II. THE SOUL OF THE ONE SEIZES OPPORTUNITIES, THE OTHER NEGLECTS THEM. The industrious man makes opportunities. He does the work of the season. The other lets opportunities pass. He "sleepeth in harvest." III. THE DESTINY OF THE ONE IS PROSPERITY, THAT OF THE OTHER RUIN. The man in the gospel who employed his talents got the "Well done!" of his Master and the rulership over many things. Laziness everywhere brings ruin. "Drowsiness clothes a man in rags." (D. Thomas, D.D.) *Diligent in business*:—This rule applies alike to the business of life and the concerns of the soul. The law holds good in common things. The earth brings forth thorns instead of grapes unless it be cultivated by the labour of man. A world bringing forth food spontaneously might have suited a sinless race, but it would be unsuitable for mankind as they now are. The fallen cannot be left idle with safety to themselves. The necessity of labour has become a blessing to man. The maxim has passed into a proverb, "If you do not wait on your business, your business will not wait on you." That diligence is necessary to progress in holiness is witnessed by all the Word of God and all the experience of His people. It would be a libel on the Divine economy to imagine that the tender plant of grace would thrive in a sluggard's garden. The work is difficult, the times are bad. He who would gain in godliness must put his soul into the business. But he who puts his soul into the business will grow rich. When all counts are closed he who is rich in faith is the richest man. (W. Arnot, D.D.) *Slack hand*:—Lazy hand. Sloth is the mother of poverty. Or the words may be rendered the hand of deceit. Without diligence honesty can scarcely be expected. Next unto virtue let children be trained up to industry, for both poverty and fraud are commonly the effect of sloth. (B. E. Nicholls, M.A.) *Diligence and prosperity*:—A connection exists between the bounty of God and the duty of man. All things are of God, and our dependence upon Him is absolute and imperative. There is a perfect accordance between the established law of nature and the law of grace. The former of these combines a dependence upon God for daily subsistence with the necessity of effort to procure it. The latter tells us, and insists upon it, that while by grace we are saved through faith which is the gift of God, we are nevertheless to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling." I. APPLY SENTIMENT OF TEXT TO THE ORDINARY AFFAIRS OF LIFE. With respect to temporal blessings. The purposes of God are never carried into effect without the use of those means by which they are intended to be accomplished. The application of these means is indispensable to the attainment of the end. If we neglect these, it will be worse than folly to hope for any blessing. What are the appointed means by which a beneficent providence supplies the temporal wants of man? 1. Diligence or industry. An unoccupied and idle man countervails all the laws both of his animal and intellectual frame and wages war upon every organ of his material structure. The law of industry is a benevolent law. If you would make a man miserable, let him have nothing to do. Idleness is the nursery of crime. 2. Economy. He who wastes what providence gives him may not complain of it being withheld or withdrawn. Nature and observation are constantly reading us this lesson. In all that God does there is nothing lost, nothing thrown away, nothing but what is designed for some useful purpose. Every natural substance that does not retain its original form passes into some other that is equally important in its way. There is no example of the entire destruction of anything in the universe. The Lord Jesus did not deem it mean to be frugal. Meanness is more justly chargeable to waste and prodigality. He that is regardless of little things will be very apt to be careless of those that are greater. 3. A sacred regard to the Lord's day. If a man would make the most of human life, to say nothing of the life to come, he must be a conscientious observer of this consecrated day. Other collateral means are, a sacred regard to truth, honesty in every transaction, rectitude and integrity of character. II. APPLY SENTIMENT OF THE TEXT TO THE INTERESTS OF THE SOUL. Many events may transpire which will frustrate the most diligent in their enterprise. Sickness, infirmity, calamity, treachery. But it is never so in the case of the soul. There is an opulence in the Divine benignity which satisfies the desire of every praying spirit. Note there is a certainty in the promise. Labour for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life shall be rewarded in the issue to the extent of our largest expectations. And at the last his joy will be full. He has gained the true riches and is rich indeed. (J. Everitt.) *Advantages of virtuous industry*:—I. The industrious man ACCOMPLISHES VERY MANY THINGS WHICH ARE PROFITABLE TO HIMSELF AND OTHERS IN NUMBERLESS RESPECTS. How many of his own wants and those of others does he not thus relieve! How many sources of welfare does he

not open to himself and others! II. If the industrious man executes many useful matters, HE EXECUTES THEM WITH FAR MORE EASE AND DEXTERITY THAN IF HE WERE NOT INDUSTRIOUS. He has no need of any long previous contest with himself. He understands, he loves the work; has a certain confidence in himself, and is more or less sure of success. III. The industrious man unfolds, exercises, PERFECTS HIS POWERS; NOT ONLY HIS MECHANICAL, BUT ALSO HIS NOBLER, HIS MENTAL POWERS. IV. The industrious man lives in the true, intimate, ENTIRE CONSCIOUSNESS OF HIMSELF, AND OF THAT WHICH HE IS AND DOES. He actually rejoices in his life, his faculties, his endowments, his time. V. The industrious man, who is so from principle and inclination, EXPERIENCES NEITHER LANGUOR NOR IRKSOMENESS. Never are his faculties, never is his time, a burden to him. VI. The industrious man has A FAR GREATER RELISH FOR EVERY INNOCENT PLEASURE, FOR EVERY RELAXATION, THAT HE ENJOYS. He alone properly knows the pleasure of rest. VII. The industrious man ALONE FULFILLS THE DESIGN FOR WHICH HE IS PLACED ON EARTH, and may say so to himself, and may in the consciousness of it be contented and cheerful. (G. J. Zollikofer.)

Ver. 5. He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.—*Summer and harvest*:—I. GOD AFFORDS YOU OPPORTUNITIES FOR GOOD. He favours you with seasons which may be considered as your harvest. 1. You are blessed with a season of gospel grace. 2. You have a season of civil and religious liberty. 3. Some are living in a religious family, where they have the benefit of instruction, prayer, and example. 4. Some have seasons of disciplinary trouble. 5. Some have seasons of conviction. 6. All have the susceptible time of youth. II. THE NECESSITY OF DILIGENCE TO IMPROVE YOUR REAPING SEASON. 1. Consider how much you have to accomplish. 2. Consider the worth of the blessings that demand your attention. 3. Remember that your labour will not be in vain in the Lord. 4. Your season for action is limited and short. 5. Reflect upon the consequences of negligence. Having made no provision for futurity—for eternity—your ruin is unavoidable. A strict account will be required of all your talents and opportunities. (William Jay.) *Using our opportunities*:—Our efforts in life must be seasonable. There is a religious forethought. He who neglects to gather in summer neglects the bounties of the Lord as well as neglects his own future necessities. The man who sleeps in harvest is pronounced a fool, because he lets his opportunity slip. The historian writes concerning Hannibal that when he could have taken Rome he would not, and when he would he could not. We are to be men of opportunity—that is to say, we are to buy up the opportunity, to redeem the time. When God opens a gate He means that we should go through it, and pass into all the inheritance beyond. There was a king of Sicily who was called “The Lingerer,” not because he stayed till opportunity came, but because he stayed till opportunity was lost. There is a time to wait and a time to act. Overlong waiting means loss of chance, for the king has passed by, and the gates are closed; but to wait patiently until everything is ripe for action is the very last expression of Christian culture. (J. Parker, D.D.) *Summer, the Christian’s gathering-time*:—I. THE PERSON SPOKEN OF. “A wise son.” II. THE SEASON IN WHICH THE WISE SON EXERTS HIMSELF. “In summer.” And why is the gospel dispensation represented by summer? 1. Winter is over and gone. His reign was tyrannical and cold. But now summer returns. So the gospel dispensation reveals to us the bright extended beams of the Sun of Righteousness. 2. In winter the face of nature is squalid and deformed. But summer comes; and, by a touch surpassing magic, beauties on beauties start into view. So the gospel dispensation mollifies the hard heart, removes the deformity of sin from the soul, adorns the temper and the conversation with all the beauties of holiness. 3. In winter the heavens distil no kindly influence; all is adverse to vegetation. But when summer returns the air breathes balm, the clouds drop fatness, and the earth is fertilised. So the gospel brings along with it refreshing clouds of spiritual influences. 4. In winter no flowers adorn the earth; their beautiful tints, their savoury smell and delicate forms sleep in the earth; but in summer these appear in rich profusion and of variegated colours. In like manner the gospel dispensation is attended with a rich profusion of gracious young converts, whose souls are endowed with knowledge, faith, and affection, and breathe forth a precious perfume, as the Holy Spirit breathes on them. 5. In winter we search the orchard and garden in vain for fruit. But when summer returns we mark with grateful pleasure the pleasant contrast, and gather the mellow fruits of various hues and

flavours. In like manner the gospel dispensation is attended with a variety of fruits to the praise of God the Father. III. I would now direct your attention to **THE EXERCISE IN WHICH THE WISE SON IS ENGAGED.** "He gathereth in summer," or during the gospel dispensation. 1. He gathereth a knowledge of God and of his duty to Him, as these are revealed in God's Word and the dispensations of His grace. 2. He gathereth holy tempers, which cause him to resemble his heavenly Father in watchfulness, patience, meekness, and forbearance. 3. He gathereth an experimental knowledge of God's providence. These are heavenly fruits; they will not corrupt, nor can they be pilfered; they will last for ever, and the happy soul will relish them through the endless ages of eternity. In conclusion, see from this subject—1. The character of one who believes and practises the true religion: he is a "wise son." 2. The excellency of the gospel dispensation. It is a season which affords every means and opportunity to promote the peace and comfort of the soul. 3. The duty and responsibility of the young. (*James Logan, M.A.*) **Youthful neglect:**—Walter Scott, in a narrative of his personal history, gives the following caution to youth: "If it should ever fall to the lot of youth to peruse these pages, let such readers remember that it is with the deepest regret that I recollect, in my manhood, the opportunities of learning which I neglected in my youth; and through every part of my literary career I have felt pinched and hampered by my own ignorance, and I would this moment give half the reputation I have had the good fortune to acquire if by so doing I could rest the remaining part upon a sound foundation of learning and science." **Thrift of time:**—Every moment lost in youth is so much character and advantage lost; as, on the other hand, every moment employed usefully is so much time wisely laid out at prodigious interest. It was to the young Mr. Gladstone was speaking when he said, "Thrift of time will repay you in after-life with a usury of profit beyond your most sanguine dreams." **Opportunity to be used:**—In our present career a man has but one chance. Time does not fly in a circle, but forth, and right on. The wandering, squandering, desiccated moral leper is gifted with no second set of early years. There is no fountain in Florida that gives perpetual youth; and the universe might be searched probably in vain for such a spring. Waste your youth; in it you shall have but one chance. Waste your middle life; in it you shall have but one chance. Waste your old age; in it you shall have but one chance. It is an irreversible natural law that character attains final permanence, and in the nature of things final permanence can come but once. This world is fearfully and wonderfully made, and so are we, and we shall escape neither ourselves nor these stupendous laws. It is not a pleasant thing to exhibit these truths from the side of terror; but, on the other side, these are truths of bliss, for, by this very law, through which all character tends to become unchanging, a soul that attains a final permanence of good character runs but one risk, and is delivered once for all from its torture and unrest. It has passed the bourne from behind which no man is caught out of the fold. (*Christian Age.*)

Ver. 7. The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot.—*The remembrance of good and forgetting of bad men:*—I. How GREAT A CONCERN MEN NATURALLY HAVE TO LEAVE AN HONOURABLE MEMORY BEHIND THEM. This idea is implied in the text, not expressed. All men in all ages have desired and endeavoured that others should entertain a good opinion of them, and if possible a great one. To this pursuit, multitudes have sacrificed their ease, their interest, the dearest of their other passions, and their lives themselves. They who know they have forfeited their title to a good character labour hard, by concealing and palliating matters, to retain as much as they can of it. A truly good person will always, in the first place, "seek the honour which cometh from God only." But still, desire of being esteemed by our fellow-creatures is a natural, and therefore an innocent passion, prompts us to what is right, and supports us in it. And we have also earnest desire of being remembered, as much to our advantage as possible, after we are gone. Though we shall not be within reach of hearing what is said of us, nor shall we be benefited by praise or hurt by reproach. Therefore some treat all concern for posthumous praise and fame as a mere absurdity. But as virtuous and beneficent actions are by far the most certain way of procuring any durable esteem from mankind, so planting in us a desire of such esteem as may endure when we are gone is providing no small security for our good behaviour here. And so this desire becomes an important blessing to us. "A good life hath but a few days; but a good name endureth for ever" (*Son of Sirach*). All this must

be cautiously understood of such reputation only as is truly good; sought from proper motives, and pursued by proper means. If people affect to be admired for excellences, which they have not, their attempt at cheating mankind will probably be as vain as it is certainly unjust. Scripture not only stigmatises those "whose glory is in their shame," but warns against so excessive an admiration, even of things in themselves valuable, as interferes with the superior regard we owe to real piety and virtue. II. WHAT CARE THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD HAVE TAKEN THAT BY WORTHY CONDUCT WE SHALL OBTAIN OUR DESIRE AND BY A CRIMINAL ONE FAIL OF IT ENTIRELY. There is a particular providence causing the memory of the just and good to flourish out of their ashes, and blasting that of the wicked. Worthy men would be pleased to have present respect paid to their characters, as well as future to their memories. And it is paid in good measure, though the deficiencies in this respect are great: due often to imperfections or eccentricities in the goodness, often to party zeal and to envy. It would probably not be to the advantage of good persons, but far from it, to have all the debt which mankind owes them paid immediately. It might endanger their humility, lead them to an uncharitable contempt of others, and a hazardous confidence in themselves. When once good men are removed to another state, all the reasons which made it unsafe for them to receive praise in this are over; and most of the reasons that made others unwilling to bestow it are over too. Generally speaking, they who deserve well have at length due acknowledgments paid to their memory. The undeserved regard of the ungodly in this life seldom outlasts them any considerable time; the name of the wicked soon rots. III. IN WHAT MANNER MAY WE BEST CONTRIBUTE TO THE DUE PAYMENT OF THOSE VERY DIFFERENT REGARDS WHICH BELONG TO THE MEMORY OF THE BAD AND THE GOOD. Vehemence and bitterness in speaking of those whom we dislike, either when they are living or when dead, is opposed to the spirit of our religion. Yet we are not prevented from forming and expressing just judgments at suitable times. For the most part the name of the wicked, if let alone, will rot of itself; and all that we shall need to do is, not to undertake the nauseous and fruitless office of embalming it. The regards due to the just are briefly these: that we believe them, on good evidence, to be the good persons they were in reality; that we consider their virtues with due esteem, and their imperfections with due candour; that we vindicate their names from unjust imputations, and make honourable mention of them whenever a fit opportunity offers; that we warn and arm ourselves against the temptations, both of prosperity and adversity, by observing how they have gone through each; that we incite ourselves to aim at more perfection in all Christian graces, by seeing in them what heights of piety and goodness are attainable; that we learn watchfulness from their falls; and that we thank God, in our retirements, for the instructions which His providence hath vouchsafed to us in their good lives. (T. Secker.) *The memory of the just:*—So far as this world is concerned, every one of us will soon cease to be a man, and be no more than a memory. Every man leaves behind him some kind of a memory; and it depends entirely on what the man has been as to what the memory shall be. There are memories that do rot; those that dwell on them, and take a delight in them, are poisoned by the contact, and all whose feelings are healthy and pure keep at a distance, and feel as if in the presence of something that was corrupt and evil. But however short life may be, it is long enough for a man to do something that will leave a memory in the world which, when he is gone, shall be a blessing to other men. I. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOLY LIVING. We never can see the force of precept fully if we never see precept embodied in action. You can never give a man a clear notion of what the image of God is unless you give him an opportunity of watching for years the life of a man who has walked with God. The memory of such a man acts as a restraint, both upon the unconverted and upon the child of God, when he is pressed by temptation. The memory of such a man acts as an encouragement. We are apt to think that the law of God is too high for us, that we cannot expect to be thoroughly consistent Christians. And yet, why not? We think those men that we see so good must be different in nature from us. But the grace that made them so holy is as free for us as it was for them. The memory is not only an encouragement, it is also a stimulus. When we hear what the good have done we feel a reproach that we have not done more. That memory is blessed which comes acting upon the spirits of men after a man is gone, and impelling them to follow him in the ways of usefulness and goodness. Such a memory is a stimulus to early consecration to God; to full and laborious consecration to God. II. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED AS AN EXAMPLE OF HOLY DYING. Even those

who do not care about living well would like to die well. Others look upon a happy death only in the light of a suitable close of a good life. There is something blessed in seeing the last days of good men. III. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED AS A TIE TO ANOTHER WORLD. Are there not many of us to whom God has given ties of this kind to that better land? The blessing in this way counteracts the curse; the curse strikes right and left with the stroke of death, and we see our dearest objects falling before our eyes. But then the blessing comes; they are redeemed; their spirits are in heaven; and our affections turn to the same objects as before. But now those affections, instead of being a tie to earth, are a tie to heaven, where those we love have gone. (*William Arthur, M.A.*) The remembrance of a noble name:—Who would not preserve a noble name? The recollection of such a name is a continual inspiration. From that recollection many things may be shed that are mere matters of detail, but the substance and the honour, the real quality and worth, abide with us evermore. Who need be ashamed to own that he had a just father and a virtuous mother? No man blushes when he cites the name of a conqueror who worked heroically and succeeded perfectly in the great warfare of life. Just memories are flowers we cannot allow to fade; we water them with our tears; by them we enrich and ennoble our prayers, and by them we animate ourselves as by a sacred stimulus. Blessed are they who have a noble past, a yesterday crowded with memories of things beautiful and lovable; they can never be lonely, they can never be sad; they walk in the company of the just and true, and the silence of the communion does not diminish its music. Here is a fame which is possible to every man. It is not possible for us all to win renown in fields of battle, in walks of literature, in lives of adventure, or in regions of discovery and enterprise—that kind of renown must be left to the few, the elect who are created to lead the world's civilisation; but the renown of goodness, the fame of purity, the reputation of excellence—these lie within the power of the poorest man that lives. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) The memory of the just:—The mind often goes back in review of the past human world. On this great field there are presented all the grand varieties of character. They come to view in great divisions and assemblages—in mass, as it were—bearing the broad distinctions of their respective ages, nations, and religions. Here and there individuals stand up conspicuously to view—of extraordinary and pre-eminent character and action. What an odious and horrid character rests upon some. They seem to bear eternal curses on their heads. And these have gone in that same character, unaltered, into another world, and that a state of retribution. But there has been “a multitude that no man can number,” bearing on earth and bearing away from it the true image of their Father in heaven. The saints of God in the past time are presented as a general comprehensive object to our memory. And we have many of “the just” retained in memory as individuals. They abide in memory, and ever will, kept alive, as it were, the images, the examples, the personifications of what we approve, admire, and feel that we ought to love and to be. Now, their memory “is blessed,” self-evidently so, for the mind blesses it, reverts to it with complacency mingled with solemnity. It is blessed when we consider them as practical illustrations, verifying examples of the excellence of genuine religion. Their memory is blessed while we regard them as diminishing to our view the repulsiveness and horror of death, and as associated with the most blessed things through all time. (*J. Foster.*) The two memories:—It is a trite saying that the present is the only period of time we can call our own; but it is a saying not less true than trite. Now is the moment of action. By our acts in this living present we shall become a power as a memory. In our footsteps our successors will trace our characters as the geologist traces those of the beasts and birds of antediluvian fame. I. WHAT DOES THE TEXT ASSERT OF THE NAME AND MEMORY OF THE WICKED? 1. A wicked man's memory lives in his children. Sometimes as a beacon to warn of danger. 2. In their sins the wicked perpetuate their memory. Those who are not content to be in the road to hell themselves, but must inveigle others into the same accursed paths, surely fasten their memories on the souls of their victims. What putrid animal matter is to our physical senses the memory of the wicked shall be to our moral sensibilities when they are gone. II. THE MEMORY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS BLESSED. True, as a rule, in the case of the children of the good man. Exceptions prove the rule. Let our children find us faithful to our principles, to our professions, to our Saviour, and when we are gone our memory “shall be blessed.” The memory of the just shall be blessed in their actions—their acts live long after they are gone, in their effects. Illustrate by the memories of the martyrs and reformers. And there are martyrs in humble life.

We have, then, a work to do, that our memories may be a blessing and not a curse, that we may leave footprints behind for others to walk in. (*W. Morris.*) *Blessed memories* :—I. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED IN THEIR INHERENT WORTH. Contrast Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Paul, Luther, &c., with Pharaoh, Voltaire, Paine, &c. Of the former, the mention of their names is as ointment poured forth, beautiful, fragrant, and costly; while the latter are only regarded with pity and regretted as a waste. II. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED IN THEIR INFLUENTIAL WORDS. Their words are blessed—1. In Christian conversation. 2. In the public mention of them. 3. In quiet meditation. And they are influential, as is evident—(1) In the history of the Christian Church. (2) In the annals of profane history. (3) In the efforts of human progress. III. THE MEMORY OF THE JUST IS BLESSED IN THEIR IMPORTANT WORKS. 1. In the books they have written. 2. In the inspiration they have given. 3. In the effects they have produced. Application: What sort of memory are we weaving for ourselves? One to be blessed, and that will remain unforgotten in the world? or one that will decay, “rot,” and around which there will cling no loving and permanent memories of Divine or human blessedness? (*T. Colclough.*)

Ver. 8. *The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall.*—*The wise take advice, fools only give it* :—Here is one of the most valuable results of wisdom. It is not what it gives, but what it receives. It receives commandments. This receptiveness is a prime characteristic of the new heart. As the thirsty ground drinks in the rain, so the wise in heart long for, and live upon, God's Word. This receptiveness is a most precious feature of character. Blessed are they that hunger, for they shall be filled. “A prating fool shall fall.” All his folly comes out. The fool, being empty, busies himself giving out instead of taking in, and he becomes still more empty. From him that hath not shall be taken. He is known, by the noise he makes, to be a tinkling cymbal. People would not have known that his head was so hollow if he had not been constantly ringing on it. To receive a lesson and put it in practice implies a measure of humility; whereas to lay down the law to others is grateful incense to a man's pride and self-importance. The Lord Himself pointed to the unsuspecting receptiveness of a little child, and said that this is the way to enter the kingdom. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *A prating fool* :—A fool of lips; a lip-fool. 1. The self-conceited are generally superficial. There is much talk and little substance; words without sense; plenty of tongue, but a lack of wit. Light matter floats on the surface, and appears to all; what is solid and precious lies at the bottom. The foam is on the face of the waters; the pearl is below. 2. The reference may be to the bluster of insubordination; the loud protestations and boastings of his independence on the part of the man who resists authority and determines to be “a law unto himself.” (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 9. *He that walketh uprightly walketh surely.*—*Upright walking sure walking* :—I. DESCRIBE THE PRACTICE ITSELF. To walk doth signify our usual course of dealing, or the constant tenor of our practice. Uprightly means “in perfection,” or “with integrity”; it denotes sincerity and purity of intention. “He that walketh uprightly” imports one who is constantly disposed in his designs and dealings to bear a principal regard to the rules of his duty and the dictates of his conscience. II. PROOF OF THE SECURITY. 1. An upright walker is secure of easily finding his way. If we will but open our eyes, the plain, straight, obvious road, the way of the just, is right in view before us. The ways of iniquity and vanity, ill designs and bad means of executing designs, are very unintelligible, very obscure, abstruse, and intricate. The ways of truth are graven in very legible characters by the finger of God upon our hearts and consciences. An upright man doth hardly need any conduct beside his own honesty. If ever such a man is at a loss as to his course, he hath always at hand a most sure guide to conduct or direct him. 2. The upright walker doth tread upon firm ground. He builds upon solid, safe, approved and well-tried principles. 3. The upright person doth walk steadily. His integrity is an excellent ballast, holding him tight and well poised in his deportment. 4. The way of uprightness is the surest for dispatch, and the shortest cut toward the execution or attainment of any good purpose. 5. The way of uprightness is in itself very safe, free of danger, tending to no mischief. 6. The way of uprightness is fair and pleasant. 7. He that walketh uprightly is secure as to his honour and credit. By pure integrity, a man first maintaineth a due respect and esteem unto

himself, then preserveth an entire reputation with others. 8. The particular methods of acting which uprightness disposeth to observe do yield great security from troubles and crosses in their transactions. 9. An upright walker hath perfect security as to the final result of affairs, that he shall not be quite baffled in his expectations and desires. 10. It is an infinite advantage of upright dealing that at the last issue, when all things shall be most accurately tried and impartially decided, a man is assured to be fully justified in it, and plentifully rewarded for it. Upright simplicity is the deepest wisdom, and perverse craft the merest shallowness. He who is true and just to others is most faithful and friendly to himself, whoever doth abuse his neighbour is his own greatest foe. (*I. Barrow, D.D.*) *The path of duty the path of safety*.—I. It is so BECAUSE OMNIPOTENCE GUARDS THE TRAVELLER (Psa. lxxiv. 14). II. It is so, HOWEVER PERILOUS IT MAY SOMETIMES APPEAR. Moses, at the Red Sea, felt it perilous, but onwards he went, and was safe. Joshua, at the Jordan, felt it perilous. He proceeded, and was safe. David confronting Goliath; Daniel, in the lion's den, kept on and were safe (see Isa. xxxiii. 15). (*Homilist.*) *Of the security of a virtuous course*.—An important maxim: in the practice of virtue there is safety. Much higher praise than this may be bestowed upon it. Let the evidence for immorality be reckoned uncertain, still it remains the truth, that, for this life, a virtuous course is the safest and the wisest. Uprightness is the same as integrity or sincerity. It implies a freedom from guile and the faithful discharge of every known duty. An upright man allows himself in nothing that is inconsistent with truth and right. He hates alike all sin, and practises every part of virtue, from an unfeigned attachment to it established in his soul. This is what is most essential to the character of an upright man. He is governed by no sinister ends or indirect views in the discharge of his duties. 1. Uprightness of character comprehends in it right conduct with respect to God. Such a man, in his religion, is that which he appears to be to his fellow-creatures. His religious acts are emanations from a heart full of piety. 2. Implies faithfulness in all our transactions with ourselves. The upright man endeavours to be faithful to himself in all that he thinks and does, and to divest his mind of all unreasonable biases. He wishes to know nothing but what is true, and to practise nothing but what is right. 3. Includes candour, fairness, and honesty in all our transactions with our fellow-creatures. An upright man may be depended on in all his professions and engagements. All his gains are gains of virtuous industry. He maintains a strict regard to veracity in his words, and to honour in his dealings. Such a man walks "surely." 1. Consider the safety which such a person enjoys with respect to the happiness of the present life. Think of the troubles that men bring on themselves by deviating from integrity. The path of uprightness is straight and broad. He that walks in it walks in the light, and may go on with resolution and confidence, inviting rather than avoiding the inspection of his fellow-creatures. 2. Upright conduct is commonly the most sure way to obtain success in our worldly concerns. The most sure way, but not always the shortest. Universal experience has proved that "honesty is the best policy." An upright man must commend himself by degrees to all that know him. He has always the greatest credit, and the most unembarrassed affairs. The disadvantages under which he labours are counterbalanced by many great advantages. Though his gains may be small, they are always sweet. He has with him an easy conscience, the blessing of God, and security against numberless grievous evils. 3. Consider the security which an upright conduct gives with respect to another world. It must be possible that there should be a future state. We may well secure the best condition and greatest safety in it. And the practice of religious goodness is the proper means to be used for this purpose. The happiness of every successive period of our human life is made to depend, in great measure, on our conduct in the preceding periods. All we observe of the government of the Deity leads us to believe that He must approve righteousness and hate wickedness. To act righteously is to act like God. And there are many reasons which prove that the neglect of virtue may be followed by a dreadful punishment hereafter—*e.g.*, the presages of conscience. These reasons the Christian religion confirms. And should all that reason and Christianity teach us on this point prove a delusion, still a good man will lose nothing, and a bad man will get nothing. Inferences: (1) How much we are bound in prudence to walk uprightly! Even if we regard only our present interest. (2) In view of another state of existence the prudence of a virtuous course is greater than can be expressed. (3) All that has been said is true, though there should be the greatest uncertainty with respect to the principles of religion. (4) With what serenity of mind a good

man may proceed through life. Whatever is true or false, he has the consciousness of being on the safe side, and there is, in all cases, a particular satisfaction attending such a consciousness. (R. Price, D.D.) *Uprightness a man's greatest security*:—The supreme aim of men is to secure that which they esteem their chief interest, and to pursue it upon the surest grounds. Man's ultimate end is happiness. I. EXPLAIN THE WORDS OF THE TEXT. Walking signifies the course of our lives. Walking honestly or deceitfully, walking in light, in darkness, and the like, is nothing else but living righteously or wickedly, behaving a man's self honestly or deceitfully in the world. Uprightly signifies in perfection, or with integrity; it denotes honesty and sincerity of intention. He who lives uprightly is he who in the general course of his life bears a constant regard to God and His commandments. To walk surely is to be in a safe condition; to be out of danger of falling into any extreme calamity. The sum of the wise man's assertion is this: He that in the whole course of his life acts sincerely and justly, with a continual respect to the reason of things, and to the law of God; that carries on all his undertakings by fair and equitable means, avoiding all frauds and deceptions, all base and unworthy practices—this man takes the wisest and surest course to succeed in all his designs, respecting either his present or his future happiness. II. PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE ASSERTION. 1. The upright man begins to act, or sets out, upon the best and surest grounds. To the undertaking and prosecuting any design upon good grounds, it is requisite—(1) That the reasons upon which a man undertakes it, be firm and stable, and such as will not change. (2) That he be well assured that the way he intends to go will lead him right to the end. (3) That he be sure not to mistake the way. 2. In the continuance and whole course of his affairs he has the greatest probability not to fall into any considerable disappointment or calamity. And this for two reasons. (1) Because the way of uprightness is in itself freest from danger, and according to the natural constitution of things, least liable to misfortunes and disappointments. (2) Because it is guarded and protected by the peculiar favour and providence of God. 3. In the end and last issue of things the upright man has the utmost security, whatever disappointments he may before meet withal, that his designs shall then be crowned with the most perfect success. It is the event and final issue of things that determines the wisdom or folly of any action. The upright man will at the end appear to have chosen the wiser course—(1) Upon account of that peace of conscience which will attend him at the hour of death; (2) of the happiness which will attend him after death—a state of joy unspeakable and full of glory. What the upright man has done shall then be vindicated and approved, and what he has suffered shall be abundantly made good. (S. Clarke, D.D.) *The centre of gravity*:—The term "upright," as applied to character, seems eminently direct and simple; yet in its origin it is as thoroughly figurative a word as any can be. It is a physical law declared applicable to a moral subject. When a man's position is physically upright, he can stand easily or bear much. He is not soon wearied; he is not easily broken down. But if his limbs are uneven, or his posture bent, he is readily crushed by the weight of another; he is soon exhausted even by his own. There is a similar law in the moral department. There is an attitude of soul which corresponds to the erect position of the body, and is called uprightness. The least deviation from the line of righteousness will take your strength away, and leave you at the mercy of the meanest foe. There is evidence enough around us that righteousness presides over the government of the world. Although men are not righteous, yet righteousness is in the long run the sweetest way to success even among men. As an upright pillar can bear a greater weight than a leaning one, so moral rectitude is strong and obliquity weak. A true witness will bear an amount of cross-questioning which is sufficient to weigh twenty false witnesses down. Truth stands longer and bears more among men than falsehood. This law, operating in the world, is a glory to God in the highest. It visibly identifies the moral Governor of mankind with the Maker of the world. (W. Arnot, D.D.) *The safety of religion*:—The term "walk" signifies a course of conduct. To walk uprightly is to pursue a course of uprightness, or integrity. He who pursues such a course walks safely. God is righteous. Being such, He must regard the righteous with approbation and complacency. I. WHAT SENTIMENTS ARE SAFE, OR WHAT MAY WE SAFELY BELIEVE? 1. It is safe to believe the Scriptures are a revelation from God. 2. To believe in the immortality of the soul and in a future state of retribution. 3. To believe that men are naturally destitute of holiness, or in other words, wholly sinful. 4. That a moral renovation or change of heart is necessary to salvation. 5. In the proper Divinity

of Jesus Christ. 6. That Christ has made an atonement for sin, and that we must be justified by faith in Him, and not by our own works. 7. That all men will not be saved. II. WHAT PRACTICE IS SAFE? All who are called Christians may be divided into two classes. One is distinguished by a strict, the other by a lax interpretation of the Divine precepts. Which of these two classes pursues the safe course? Which is most dangerous—to have too little religion or too much? Surely he only who walks strictly walks safely. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The upright walker*:—The man who walks uprightly is relieved from all fear, and is inspired by the very spirit of courage. He knows that he means to be right, to do right, and therefore he can challenge the world to find fault with him. He glories in an honest purpose. The man who goes through life by crooked paths, sinuously endeavouring to avoid royal thoroughfares, will be discovered, and because he has a consciousness of this ultimate detection he lives a life of perpetual unrest. The man who perverts his ways shall be instructed by misfortune. He would not listen to more genial teachers, he put away from him the spirit of counsel and understanding, so the grim monitor known by the name of Misfortune, comes and conducts his schooling, compelling him to read hard words, and to undergo severe discipline. Honesty is a child of the daylight, and true honour works for no advantage, but submits itself to the most searching analysis and criticism. "The righteous are bold as a lion." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *How to be strong, safe, happy, and eternally progressive*:—This is a practical maxim which, if generally adopted and carried out in action, would change the whole aspect and condition of the world, producing order, peace, and happiness where now reign only disorder, misery, and crime. What is it to be right? It is to have our feeling, sentiments, and conduct conformed to the will of God, the eternal rule of right; or it is to think, feel, and act in accordance with the immutable standard of truth and right revealed in the Word of God. How extensive a thing right is! It takes in both the inner and outer man; both the duties which we owe to ourselves, and those which we owe to our fellow-men and to God. I. TO BE RIGHT IS TO BE STRONG. All the various faculties God has given us attain their most perfect development, activity, and strength only when they are nurtured and trained, and are exercised in accordance with the laws of right. This is true of body, mind, and heart. This is supported by Bible examples. This is a source of strength which can be found nowhere else. It brings the whole man into harmony with himself, reason, conscience, will—and all these into harmony with God and the great forces of His moral government and providence. Strength in being right is real strength. II. TO BE RIGHT IS TO BE SAFE. This must be true, since God and His government are on the side of right, and all His perfections are pledged for the safety and ultimate well-being of them that obey His laws. He walks in the light who is right. It is true, even in regard to our temporal interests, that to be right is to be safe. We sometimes see a man apparently prosperous and happy in a course of wrong-doing. But he is all the while in danger. The path of rightness may not always be the shortest way to temporal prosperity, but it is always, in the long run, the surest. Much more, to be right is to be safe in regard to our spiritual and eternal interests. III. TO BE RIGHT IS TO BE HAPPY. This might be inferred with entire certainty from the design of the Creator in making us free moral agents; from the faculties He has given us, and the laws He has impressed on our being and ordained for our obedience; and also from the various provisions of His providence and grace, as well as from the abundant teachings and promises of His Word. The happiness of God consists in His being right. He is infinitely happy because He is infinitely righteous, true, just, and good. IV. TO BE RIGHT IS TO BE IN A POSITION OF ETERNAL PROGRESS IN ALL THAT ADDS DIGNITY AND BLESSEDNESS TO AN IMMORTAL NATURE. What have we to do, in this state of probation, to secure the highest good of our souls? how rise to the highest dignity and happiness which our immortal natures are made capable of attaining? Only one answer can be given. It is by being right: right with God, right with our own moral and immortal nature, and right with the principles of that eternal government which the Creator has ordained, and under which we are to live for ever and ever. The man who is right has God on his side, and the laws of the universe on his side, and all good beings on his side; and into whatever part of the universe he may remove, God is there, surrounding him with His everlasting favour, and he cannot be otherwise than safe and happy. Practical lessons: 1. God exercises a moral government over this world. He has made us free moral agents. He has placed us under wise and benevolent laws, sanctioned by rewards

and punishments, which are sure to follow in the line of right or wrong-doing. Results are not complete in this life. Things are now in progress; the full consequences of human conduct lie in the future. But what we see here is sufficient to convince us that God reigns over this world as a righteous moral Governor. 2. We may learn what is true policy. It is always and in all circumstances to do what is right. Cunning, compromise, artifice, expediency, and fraud may seem to work well for a time, but mischief and evil are sure to come in the issue. The effect always is to corrupt moral principle, to weaken conscience, to darken the mind, and to arm providence, and the course of nature, and the Word of God against those who thus sacrifice right for expediency, and principle for policy. 3. No change in a man's life is so great as when he is truly converted from sin to holiness, and comes under the law of right as his ruling principle of action. It changes his whole state and prospects for eternity. 4. How urgent, then, are the reasons for seeking to be right above all things else—right with ourselves, right with our fellow-men, right with God and the eternal laws and principles of His government. (*J. Hauges, D.D.*) *The practice of religion enforced by reason*:—Walking represents an active principle in an active posture. As the nature of man carries him out to action, the same nature renders him solicitous about the issue and event of his actions. A man must take care not to be deceived in the rule which he proposes for the measure of his actions. This he may be—1. By laying false and deceitful principles. 2. In case he lays right principles, yet by mistaking in the consequences which he draws from them. He who guides his actions by the rules of piety and religion lays these two principles as the great ground of all that he does. (1) That there is an infinite, eternal, all-wise mind governing the affairs of the world, and taking such an account of the actions of men as, according to the quality of them, to punish or reward them. (2) That there is an estate of happiness or misery after this life, allotted to every man, according to the quality of his actions here. Consider these principles under a threefold supposition. I. AS CERTAINLY TRUE. It is necessary that there should be some first mover; and if so, a first being; and the first being must infer an infinite, unlimited perfection in the said being. All other perfection must be derived from it, and so we infer the creation of the world. If God created the world, He must govern it, and this by means suitable to the natures of the things He governs, and to the attainment of the proper ends of government. As man is a moral agent, he must be governed by laws, and these sustained by sanctions. While a man steers his course by these principles he acts prudentially and safely. The presuming sinner can have only two excuses. 1. That God is merciful, and will not be so severe as His word. 2. That a future repentance is possible. But, upon supposition of the certain truth of the principles of religion, he who walks not uprightly has neither from the presumption of God's mercy reversing the decree of His justice, nor from his own purposes of a future repentance, any sure ground to set his foot upon, but in this whole course acts as directly in contradiction of nature, as he does in defiance of grace. II. AS PROBABLE. Probability does not properly make any alteration, either in the truth or falsity of things; but only imports a different degree of their clearness or appearance to the understanding. The first rudiments and general notions of religion, natural religion, are universal. These consist in the acknowledgment of a Deity, and of the common principles of morality, and a future estate of souls after death. But if there were really no such things, how could this persuasion come to be universal? Can we conceive that the whole world has been brought to conspire in the belief of a lie? It is sufficient to render unbelief inexcusable, even upon the account of bare reason, if so be the truth of religion carry in it a much greater probability than any of those ratiocinations that pretend the contrary. Proved by two considerations. 1. That no man, in matters of this life, requires an assurance either of the good he designs or of the evil which he avoids from arguments demonstratively certain, but judges himself to have sufficient ground to act upon, from a probable persuasion of the event of things. 2. Bare reason will oblige a man voluntarily and by choice to undergo any less evil, to secure himself from the probability of an evil incomparably greater. Since probability, in the nature of it, supposes that a thing may or may not be so, for anything that yet appears, or is certainly determined on either side, we will here consider both sides of this probability. (1) It is one way possible, that there be no such thing as a future state of happiness or misery for those who have lived well or ill here. Then he who, upon the strength of a contrary belief, abridged himself in the gratification of his appetites, sustains only this evil—if it

be evil—that he did not please his senses as he might have done. (2) But, on the other side, it is probable that there will be such a future estate, and then how miserably is the voluptuous, sensual unbeliever left in the lurch! III. As FALSE. Even on this account he who walks uprightly walks more surely than the wicked and profane liver. 1. In reputation or credit. 2. In respect of the ease, peace, and quietness which he enjoys in this world. 3. In the health of his body. Virtue is a friend and help to nature. It may be said that many sinners escape the calamities of life. But this may be due to their luck, or benign chance. Many more sinners are plunged into calamities by their sins than escape them. And sin has in itself a natural tendency to bring men under all evils, and if persisted in, will infallibly end in them. (R. South.) *Walking uprightly:—* Happiness is the favourite wish and the alluring object which every living creature pursues. In pursuing the end all are agreed, but in the ways of securing the end they differ widely. The choice of these means shows a man to be wise or foolish, religious or wicked. Man, besides his innate appetite for happiness, has a superior principle in him, which is reason; and reason will inform him that happiness, all joy and no sorrow, is unattainable and impossible under present conditions. The only way to obtain true happiness is to walk uprightly. It may, however, be said, that although the position in the text should be allowed to be true, yet it contains a truth of very little use or comfort to us, and a promise which none of us can apply to his own person; seeing that we are all sinners in various degrees. Two observations take off the force of this objection. 1. Though uprightness means goodness, and an upright man is a perfect and righteous man, this is not the character here represented. Here uprightness is a social virtue, producing a good conduct towards others. He who in all his dealings is honest, sincere, charitable, candid, and friendly, will in return receive good-usage and escape ill-usage. The promised reward of safety is also of the social kind, namely, security and peace, honour and reputation, esteem and favour, encouragement and assistance, rather than the future rewards of righteousness. Any person, therefore, may apply this encouragement to well-doing to himself. 2. Though we should suppose the uprightness mentioned in the text to mean goodness in general, and a goodness to which we cannot pretend, yet we may hope to make some advances towards it, and consequently may hope to come in for some share of the reward. If he who walketh uprightly in all respects, walketh surely in all respects, he who endeavours to do so, and on several occasions does walk uprightly, will obtain some degree of safety and security, proportionably to his moral improvements. I. THE WAYS OF THE RIGHTEOUS ARE PLAIN, DIRECT, EVEN WAYS. Nothing is less difficult than to know our duty, and our interests also, if there be a sincerity of intention, and an integrity of heart. Christian faith and Christian practice are plain and perspicuous so far as they are of universal importance and of absolute necessity. The ways of the unrighteous are dark, crooked, rough, and slippery ways. What is to be said beforehand for the obtaining of criminal pleasures? And how much is to be given up? What are the consequences of such proceedings? and what the vain hopes on which such a person relies? II. HE WHO WALKS UPRIGHTLY ACTS UPON GOOD MORAL PRINCIPLES, WHICH WILL STAND THE TEST OF THE STRICTEST SCRUTINY. The belief of these principles is absolutely necessary even for upholding civil government and preserving human society. All other springs and motives of action, besides reason and religion, are fickle and various. An upright person in all cases and conditions is the same person and goes the same way. By this he is secured from diffidence and self-distrust and distraction of mind. III. HE THAT WALKETH UPRIGHTLY HAS TAKEN THE PROPER WAY TO ATTAIN ALL THAT A MAN CAN REASONABLY HOPE AND DESIRE IN THIS WORLD. This proper way Scripture calls the straight and the plain way, viz., the way of diligence and benevolence, of honour, honesty, and integrity, which may seem to be slow, but is both sure and speedy also. IV. HE WHO DESIGNS ONLY WHAT IS JUST AND REASONABLE CAN RUN NO GREAT HAZARD. He is not likely to receive any great injury from intriguing men, or trouble from the vain and busy world. Nor is he likely to raise up adversaries. Serenity, satisfaction, and a just confidence always attend upon him. Good dispositions of the heart, like great abilities of the mind, are open, free, unsuspicious, courageous, and liberal. The upright person is constant and consistent with himself; his heart and his face, his mind and his speech, his professions and his deeds agree together. So men place confidence in him. He is secure as to the final result of affairs, the main end, and the considerable purposes of human life. If prosperity consists in a satisfaction of mind upon the whole, he cannot fail of

being prosperous. V. EITHER THERE IS A FUTURE STATE OR THERE IS NOT. In either case the upright man is safe. He alone can make the best of both worlds. Do not, then, be weak enough to grieve or repine at the seeming prosperity of the wicked sons of fortune, who obtain a greater influence of worldly favours than many persons far better than themselves. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*) *The upright walker*:—His walk may be slow, but it is sure. He that hasteth to be rich shall not be innocent nor sure; but steady perseverance in integrity, if it do not bring riches, will certainly bring peace. In doing that which is just and right we are like one walking upon a rock, for we have confidence that every step we take is upon solid and safe ground. On the other hand, the utmost success through questionable transactions must always be hollow and treacherous, and the man who has gained it must always be afraid that a day of reckoning will come, and then his gains will condemn him. Let us stick to truth and righteousness. By God's grace let us imitate our Lord and Master, in whose mouth no deceit was ever found. Let us not be afraid of being poor, nor of being treated with contempt. Never, on any account whatever, let us do that which our conscience cannot justify. If we lose inward peace, we lose more than a fortune can buy. If we keep in the Lord's own way, and never sin against our conscience, our way is sure against all comers. Who is he that can harm us if we be followers of that which is good? We may be thought fools by fools if we are firm in our integrity; but in the place where judgment is infallible we shall be approved. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Integrity most successful*:—A straight line is the shortest in morals as well as in geometry. (*Isaac Barrow.*) *An upright posture*:—An upright posture is easier than a stooping one, because it is more natural, and one part is better supported by another; so it is easier to be an honest man than a knave. (*T. Skelton.*)

Ver. 11. **The mouth of the righteous is a well of life.**—*Streams in the desert*:—A man who receives, professes, and obeys the truth, is like a well of water; while a man who retains the form of religion, but denies its power, is like a waterless well. I. **THE TRUE BELIEVER IS LIKE A WELL.** The likeness between the natural and the spiritual may be thus traced. 1. In the manner of its flow. It is an overflow. When the well flows for the benefit of others, itself is full. Itself is satisfied, and out of its abundance it flows over to satisfy the wants of others. When a Christian has not much for himself, he has nothing for his neighbours. As the full well must run over, so the satisfied soul must make known in some form the Saviour's love. 2. In the effects of its overflow. It refreshes and fertilises the surrounding barrenness. Travellers always take special notice of the effects produced by springs on certain spots in the desert. They make oases. So the neighbourhood feels the effect of the presence of Christians. There cannot be a lively Christian in a godless family, or a lively Church in a godless neighbourhood, without some spiritual commotion among those who are near. 3. As to source whence the well gets its supply. Though the water springs up from beneath, the supply has come down from above. So the Christian says, "All my springs are in Thee." The facts in nature are well known. For Christians, all depends on the supply they get from a covenant God. The Spirit poured out reaches by hidden paths the veins of the heart, and fills it—then it can overflow in blessing. This truth is taught as a doctrine (John vii. 37-39), and manifested in the experience of the disciples (Luke ix. 54). II. **A HYPOCRITE IS LIKE A WELL WITHOUT WATER.** He who has neither the profession nor the power, is not a well at all. He who has the profession but not the power is a well, but there is no water in it. Counterfeit Christians are not simply useless, they are destroyers (compare Jude ver. 12: "Clouds without water"). Christian professors need to see well to it that they are not deceiving and destroying their neighbours. Their profession constitutes them wells, but what if they are wells without water? When God finds us dry, we have cause to fear lest He visit us in judgment, and cut off from us our own supply. Practical lessons: 1. Some wells are not empty, and yet are as useless as if they were. They are filled with bitter water. Some professing Christians with knowledge and correct principles, nevertheless are of an angry, biting, censorious, malicious, proud, selfish spirit. Let Christians imitate the gentleness as well as the faithfulness of Christ. 2. Some wells are not empty, and yet are as useless as if they were. They are filled, or nearly filled, with stagnant water. The water is stagnant, for none has found its way in for a long time from the secret channels, and none has run out over the brim. Secret, earnest, constant getting of the fulness that is hid in

Christ is the only sure way of being blessed yourself and becoming a blessing to others. (*Christian Treasury.*)

Ver. 12. Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.—*The hiding work of love:*—Love is not a New Testament virtue or grace, nor is it left for the New Testament to praise it in high strains of music. From the beginning love has been an angel in the world, gladdening men by its brightness, soothing men by its persuasiveness, and luring souls with infinite gentleness towards all that is true and beautiful. Love takes the largest view of life—it does not vex itself with temporary details, with transient aberrations; it looks down into the very core and substance of the soul, and, knowing that the heart is true in its supreme desires, it covers many flaws and specks, yea, even faults and sins, in the hope that concealment may destroy their influence and their very existence. There is a covering up which is a vain concealment, a merely deceitful trick; no such covering up is meant here: this is rather the covering up with which God covers the iniquities of the pardoned man, the sins of him who has confessed all his guilt, and desired an exercise of the Divine mercy. Love is not mere sentiment, an easy-going action of the mind, too self-complacent and self-indulgent to enter with energy into any moral inquiry. The love which is commended in Scripture is an ardent love, keen, critical, sagacious, far-sighted, not imagining that things are destroyed because they are concealed; it is the love of God which at all costs must expel sin from the universe, and set up the kingdom of God among men. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Charity like the orchid:*—In tropical forests the orchids thrust out long floating roots into mid-air, from the impure vapours of which they draw their nourishment. They live on trunks of huge decaying trees, which, as decomposition proceeds very rapidly, would, if left alone, fill the air with poisonous gases. But the orchid swings in rich festoons over the rotting boughs: covers the deformity with its own loveliness, absorbs all foul exhalations and turns them into the perfume of its own sweet flowers. Charity is this beautiful orchid, covering human frailty, clearing away harsh, suspicious, and cruel slanders; breathing forth merciful judgments, compassionate sympathy. (*James Neil, M.A.*)

Ver. 13. In the lips of him that hath understanding wisdom is found.—*Contrasts:*—I. AN INTELLECTUAL CONTRAST.—The difference existing between men in relation to the amount of knowledge is of vast variety. The disparity arises from a difference in mental constitution, and in educational opportunities. The intelligent man—1. Communicates wisdom. When he speaks men are enlightened, their minds are set to think, and their spirits are refreshed. 2. Accumulates wisdom. It is a characteristic of knowledge in the mind that with its increase there is an increase both in the mind's desire for larger intelligence, and in its capacity for it. Of the man void of understanding Solomon says two things. There is a "rod for his back," and "his mouth is near destruction." He is the subject of coercion; he has not intelligence enough to be swayed by argument. Hence his language is so mischievous, he babbles and blabs so recklessly, meddling, perhaps, with other men's concerns, that he brings ruin on himself, his mouth is always near destruction. II. A SOCIAL CONTRAST. Social differences among men are as great as the mental. The rich man's confidence is in his "strong city." But he cannot shut out disease, bereavement, death, or care. The tendency of wealth is to dispose its possessors to trust to safety where no safety is. III. A MORAL CONTRAST. According to the constitution of things righteous labour tends to life, bodily, mental, and spiritual. Sin is here put in contrast with life, and it is the true antithesis. Sin is death, the death of the true, the divine, and the happy. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 14. Wise men lay up knowledge.—*Experience kept for use:*—Another brief definition of wisdom. Many get knowledge, and let it go as fast as they get it. They put their winnings into a bag with holes. The part of wisdom is to treasure up experience, and hold it ready for use in the time and place of need. Everything may be turned to account. Even losses may be converted into gains. Let nothing trickle out and flow away useless. None of the wisdom comes for nothing, either to old or young. Our Father in heaven gives us the best kind; and the best kind is that which is bought. The saddest thing is when people are always paying, and never possessing. The cleverest people are in many cases the least successful. A man of moderate gifts, but steadfast acquisitiveness, lays up more than a man of the

brightest genius, whether the treasure sought be earthly substance or heavenly wisdom. Men, looking on the outward appearance, make great mistakes in judging of men. Those who give out little noise may have laid up much wisdom. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Wise men lay up knowledge*:—In Eastern countries men lay up garments, and pride themselves in the number of their suits of apparel. In our land men lay up money. But this is not "wisdom." In Egypt Joseph laid up corn for the day of famine; and in Syria men lay up water for the summer in cisterns under their houses. This is wisdom; but still it is not the wisdom of which Solomon speaks. The astronomer lays up the knowledge of the stars; and the botanist lays up the knowledge of plants and flowers. This is wisdom, but it is not that of which the text speaks. The knowledge that is best for us is the knowledge of God Himself; and though the knowledge of His works is good, the knowledge of Himself is far better. It is only this knowledge that can make you happy, or bring blessing to your soul. A poor woman, that could not read a word, once said to me, "You see I'm no scholar; but I'm Christ's scholar, and that will do." Yes, it was enough; for it made her "wise unto salvation." She was one of the wise women that "lay up knowledge." This is the knowledge which you must have; you will find it in the Bible; and the Holy Spirit is most willing to become your teacher. (*Christian Treasury*.)

Ver. 15. The rich man's wealth is his strong city.—*The money power*:—Here he is describing what is, rather than prescribing what ought to be. In all ages and in all lands money has been a mighty power, and its relative importance increases with the advance of civilisation. It does not reach the Divine purpose; but it controls human action. The Jews wield this money power in a greater degree than any other people. Over against this formidable power stands the counterpart weakness—"the destruction of the poor is their poverty." This feebleness of the body politic is as difficult to deal with as its active diseases. If pauperism be not so acute an affection as crime it is more widely spread, and requires as much of the doctor's care. Besides being an ailment itself, it is a predisposition to other and more dangerous evils. We are under law to God. The wheels of His providence are high and dreadful. If we presumptuously or ignorantly stand in their way, they will crush us by their mighty movements. We must set ourselves, by social arrangements, to diminish temptations, and by moral appliances to reclaim the vicious, if we expect to thrive or even to exist as a community. Money answereth all things in its own legitimate province of material supply, but when beyond its province you ask it to stop the gaps which vice is making, it is a dumb idol—it has no answer to give at all. A large proportion of the penniless are in a greater or less degree reckless. Partly their recklessness has made them poor, and partly their poverty has made them reckless. When a multitude who are all poor combine for united action, rash and regardless spirits gain influence and direct their course. Money, though a bad master, is a good servant. Money to the working man would answer all the ends which a strike contemplates, if each, by patient industry and temperance, would save a portion for himself. The whole community of rich and poor, linked together in their various relations, may be likened to a living body. The promiscuous mass of human beings that are welded together by their necessities and interests in this island is like a strong swimmer in the sea, and alas! it is too often like "a strong swimmer in his agony." Two truths stand out conspicuously from all the confusion. The world has a righteous Ruler, and the Ruler has a dislocated world to deal with. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) **The destruction of the poor is their poverty.**—*The destruction of the poor*:—1. Poor people mostly remain poor, for want of the means of rising. 2. The poor are sometimes despised and down-trodden by the proud. 3. They are often reckless, spending their little foolishly. But for this numbers would be richer. 4. They are especially tempted to dishonesty. (*Wesleyan S. S. Magazine*.)

Ver. 18. He that uttereth a slander is a fool.—*The folly of slander*:—1. **SLANDERING IS FOOLISH, AS SINFUL AND WICKED.** All sin is foolish upon many accounts. To lie simply is a great fault, being a deviation from that good rule which prescribeth truth in all our words. Of all lies those certainly are the worst which proceed from malice, or from vanity, or from both, and which work mischief; such slanders are. To bear any hatred or ill-will towards any man is a heinous fault. Of this the slanderer is most guilty in the highest degree. Incurable are the wounds which the slanderer inflicteth, irreparable the damages which he

causeth, indelible the marks which he leaveth. All injustice is abominable; and of this the slanderer is most deeply guilty. The slanderer may indeed conceive it no great matter that he committeth; because he doth not act in a boisterous and bloody way, but only by words, which are subtle, slim, and transient things. 'Tis only an imaginary stain that he daubeth his neighbour with; therefore he supposeth no great wrong done. But these conceits arise from great inconsiderateness or mistake. II. THE SLANDERER IS A FOOL, BECAUSE HE MAKETH WRONG JUDGMENTS AND VALUATIONS OF THINGS. And accordingly driveth on silly bargains for himself, in result whereof he proveth a great loser. The slanderer may pretend that what he does is for the sake of orthodox doctrines, or for advantage of the true Church. This indeed is the covert of innumerable slanders; zeal for some opinion, or some party, beareth out men of sectarian and factious spirits in such practices; they may do, they may say, anything for those fine ends. This plea will in no wise justify such practices. Truth does not need, and it loathes and scorns the patronage and the succour of lies. To prostitute the conscience, or sacrifice our honesty, for any cause, in any interest whatever, can never be warrantable or wise. III. THE SLANDERER IS A FOOL, BECAUSE HE USETH IMPROPER MEANS AND PREPOSTEROUS METHODS OF EFFECTING HIS PURPOSES. The straight way is always shorter than the oblique and crooked. The plain way is easier than the rough and cragged. Using strict veracity and integrity, candour and equity, is the best method of accomplishing good designs. IV. THE SLANDERER IS A VERY FOOL, as bringing many great inconveniences, troubles, and mischiefs on himself. 1. A fool's mouth is his destruction. If any kind of speech is destructive and dangerous, then is this slander kind most dangerous of all. Men will rather pardon a robber of their goods, than a defamer of their good name. 2. The slanderer is apprehended as a common enemy; all men are rendered averse from him, and ready to cross him. 3. All ingenious and honest persons have an aversion from the practice of the slanderer, and cannot entertain it with any acceptance or complacency. It is only ill-natured and ill-nurtured, unworthy and naughty people, that are willing auditors or encouragers thereof. 4. The slanderer doth banish himself from all conversation and company. 5. He derogateth wholly from his own credit in all matters of discourse. 6. This practice is perpetually haunted with most troublesome companions, inward regret, self-condemnation, fear and disquiet. 7. The consequence of this practice is commonly shameful disgrace, with an obligation to retract, and render satisfaction; for seldom doth calumny pass long without being detected and confuted. 8. He can never have sound quiet in his mind, he can never expect pardon from heaven, without acknowledging his fault, repairing the wrong he hath done, restoring that good name of which he dispossessed his neighbour. 9. This practice doth also certainly revenge itself, imposing on its actor a perfect retaliation, an irrecoverable infamy to himself, for the infamy he caused to others. 10. The slanderer doth banish himself from heaven and happiness, doth expose himself to endless miseries and sorrows. Is not he, then, who, out of malignity or vanity, to serve any design, or soothe any humour in himself or others, involves himself in all these great evils, a most desperate and deplorable fool? Persons of a generous and honest mind cannot but scorn to debase and defile themselves by so mean and vile a practice; and so do those who seriously profess Christianity; that is, the religion which peculiarly above all others prescribeth the constant truth, strictest justice, and highest charity. (I. Barrow, D.D.) *The tongue*.—Sent by his master to purchase the best dish the market could supply, Æsop provided only tongues, which were served up with different sauces for every course; ordered afterwards to provide the worst things he could find, he again appeared with a supply of tongues. The moral is obvious. I. THE LANGUAGE OF DECEIT (ver. 18). Lying is a sin committed by—1. The false witness (chap. xiv. 5). 2. The dishonest tradesman (chap. xx. 14). II. THE LANGUAGE OF SLANDER (ver. 18). "The safe rule as to the government of the tongue in society," says Dean Goulburn, "is to stand at a very respectful distance from all such topics as our neighbour's conduct and character." III. THE LANGUAGE OF PROFUSION (ver. 19). It is better to say nothing than that what we say should be nothing to the purpose. Profuse talkers often transgress the law of—1. Reverence (Eccles. v. 2). 2. Courtesy. Conversation is not merely talking to people, but talking with people (Rom. xv. 2). 3. Integrity. When speech runs in advance of thought, it is apt to run in advance of truth (Col. iv. 6; Titus ii. 8). 4. Prudence (John xvi. 12). The restraint of the tongue is a Christian duty (Matt. xxvii. 14; James i. 26). IV. THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION (vers. 20, 21).

Two figures are used. "Choice silver" represents worth. Good words are a choice heritage. They are valuable because they create good thoughts and often lead to good acts (Psa. xxiv. 11). The 21st verse gives us the thought of food ("feed many"). The words of the true man of God are food for the soul. The lips of the righteous utter the words of wisdom (ver. 30), for there is a vital connection between what a man is and what he says and does (Acts iv. 20; Cor. iv. 13). (*H. Thorne.*)

Ver. 19. In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin.—The sin of gab:— Carlyle says, "There is a great necessity indeed of getting a little more silent than we are. It seems to me that the finest nations in the world—England and America—are going away into wind and tongue; but it will appear sufficiently tragical by and by, long after I am away out of it (the world). Silence is the eternal duty of a man. 'Watch the tongue' is a very old precept, and a most true one." The most thinking men of all ages have felt a similar conviction of the enormous evil of garrulousness. I. IT IS A SIN AGAINST THE SPEAKER HIMSELF. A man whose tongue is always wagging, is doing a serious injury to his own intellectual and spiritual nature. 1. Great volubility is a substitute for thought. The man mistakes words for thoughts. Plato says, "As empty vessels make the loudest sound, so they that have the least wit are the greatest babblers." 2. Great volubility is a quietus to thought. The man who has the power of talking without thinking will soon cease to think; his mental faculties fall into disuse under the constant pressure of verbosity. II. IT IS A SIN AGAINST THE HEARER. Such men— 1. Waste the precious time of the hearer. 2. They foster self-deception. The most ignorant as well as the largest congregations attend the ministry of the garrulous preacher. 3. They propagate crude opinions instead of divine principles. "We have two ears and but one tongue, that we may hear much and talk little." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. The heart of the wicked is little worth.—The heart not good where the practice is evil:—It is a dangerous opinion that however a man may deviate in his general practice from the habits of morality and religion, yet still he may be possessed of a good heart at bottom. If we trace the rise and progress of this baneful opinion, we shall find its origin in the confusion of ideas prevalent relative to the determination of what is to be called good, and what evil. This has given rise to so untoward and irreligious a separation of the heart of a man from his outward actions, as to decide that the former may continue to be good, while the latter are continually evil. This notion is supported by much irreligious literature. There are writers who affect to measure the worth of every action by the standard of sensibility—an ambiguous word, that is made to overleap every fence of judgment, to throw down every bulwark of rational conviction, and to exalt itself above everything that is serious, solid and virtuous. The heart of such an one as pursues wicked courses, notwithstanding all the insinuations, assertions, and misrepresentations of most dangerous and deceitful writers of every kind, "is of little worth," and yet it is a false and sinful principle to maintain the contrary. If such a heart can be called good, then must virtue and vice have changed their names and qualities; then must religion consist in a total disregard for all serious impression and an absolute forgetfulness of Almighty God; then did our blessed Saviour deliver the admirable precepts of Christianity, to be corrected, revised, altered, and overturned by the maxims of worldly honour. As youthful folly is but too generally the foundation of sin, so is infidelity but too often its superstructure or final result; and the heart is undoubtedly the seat or fruitful parent of both. The heart, in a natural sense, is the seat of life and action. The heart signifies, in a moral sense, the vital principle of all good and evil, of all that purifies or defiles a man, of all that procures him blame or praise, and that renders him justly liable to reward or punishment, either in this life or another. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he," so are his actions. Is, then, every one who doeth any evil corrupt at heart? No; every one doth evil at times. But if any one should think he might do much evil without corrupting his heart, he is grievously mistaken, and will soon find himself so. May not a man's actions be so poised between good and evil, that it is hard to determine which preponderates? There is a mixture of good and evil in every character, but this is seldom in such equal proportions as makes it difficult to ascertain whether the good or evil preponderates. It is hardly possible for any length of time to keep the balance even betwixt the good and the evil. Either good

habits will ere long gain the ascendancy in the heart, or evil ones. Another objection is—Do we not say there are no hopes of reclaiming such an one, he is bad at heart; and does not this seem to imply that a man may have committed a great deal of evil before he can be said to be bad at heart? While the heart is balancing between good and evil, we may not call it bad; when it bends down and keeps down on the evil side, it is bad, and most difficult to be reclaimed by any human means. Yet we may not say that any heart becomes so bad as to be beyond all convicting and converting influences. But it may be said—Is there not a degree of evil actions where the heart is manifestly good? The persons hinted at in this objection are those who have the best intentions in the world, the best dispositions, but whose understandings and judgments do not keep pace with the excess of their goodness. Such persons do not always plan with discretion, or execute with prudence. And they are often the dupes of crafty and designing persons. A good heart is liable to error. Since, then, there is no foundation for that pernicious opinion that a man's heart may be good whilst the general tenor of his actions is immoral and evil, let us earnestly avoid being misled by such idle sophistry, such false reasoning. Let us not listen to the specious allurements of refined sentiment, or to the subtleties of vain philosophy. Let us not set up the imaginations of man above the plain doctrines and precepts of God. (*C. Moore, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it.—Riches in God's blessing:—I. GOD'S BLESSING GIVES MATERIAL WEALTH. The silver and the gold are His, and He gives them to whomsoever He will. He who rules in the highest, reaches down to the minutest concerns of this world, and controls them all. II. GOD'S BLESSING MAKES RICH. His blessing is riches, although the wealth of the world should all flee away. There are two ways of acquiring wealth. Some people grow rich without God's blessing, and some grow rich by it. The god of this world gives riches to his subjects sometimes, when neither giver nor getter own the supremacy of the Almighty; and God Himself gives riches to some who are His children. Wherein lies the difference, since both the godly and the godless have gotten wealth? It lies here: God addeth no sorrow with it, but that other lord does. Sorrow is sure to come with ill-gotten wealth. It lies like a burning spark on the conscience, which will not out all the rich man's days. Sometimes the wealth is scattered by public judgments. Sometimes it becomes the source of family strife. There are many arrows of judgment in the Almighty's quiver. If you take God into your counsels, and so grow rich, there will be no bitterness infused into your gains. A human soul is so made that it cannot safely have riches next it. If they come into direct contact, they will clasp it too closely; if they remain, they wither the soul's life away; and if they are violently wrenched off, they tear the soul's life asunder. Whether, therefore, you keep them or lose them, if you clasp them to your soul with nothing more spiritual between, they will become its destroyer. Certain tortures that savages have invented and applied to the human bodies bear an analogy to the process by which his money makes the miser miserable, alike when it abides with him and when it departs. They wrap the body of the living victim all round in a thick impermeable plaster, and then set him free. If the covering remains all the pores of the body are clogged, the processes of nature are impeded, and the life pines away; if it is torn off, it tears the skin with it,—the pain is sooner over, but it is more severe. Thus the soul of a thorough worldling is either choked by wealth possessed, or torn by wealth taken away. Out of that dread dilemma he cannot wriggle. The laws of God have shut him in. The Maker of the soul is its portion. He made it for Himself. When riches are clasped closest to the heart, He is slighted and dishonoured. If you be Christians, if you have put on Christ, great riches may come and go; you will not be clogged while you have them; you will not be naked when they leave. But if the wealth be the first and inner wrapping of the soul, how shall that soul ever get into contact with the Saviour, that life from its fountain may flow into the dead? It is easy for a Christian to be rich, but hard for a rich man to become a Christian. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *New hopes for a new year:—*Whatever may be your ideas of your own powers and resources—whatever may be the confidence that you put in man, or the trust that you repose in princes—you may be quite sure of this, that it is only the blessing of the Lord that maketh rich, and that addeth no sorrow. The blessings of God are not marred or mixed with evil. Paraphrase the text thus—"All that God gives to do us good really secures our good without any admixture of evil." Two facts in connection

with the Divine blessing. I. **IT ENRICHES.** Some Divine gifts are granted in displeasure. It is possible to connect sorrow with that which God intends ultimately to prove a blessing. Sometimes the blessing of the Lord is material and temporal wealth, as in the case of Abraham and of Job. Much wealth is, alas! gotten by vanity and dishonesty—by treachery and falsehood and over-reaching, and by that indefinable sin, but that exceedingly common sin, covetousness. Sorrow was added in the case of Lot's wealth; but then Lot added the sorrow. There was no sorrow with the portion of Abraham. More frequently the blessing is not wealth, but food convenient for us. I know the great number of the poor, but there is a far greater number of persons not poor. Our attention is often directed to the poverty which exists, but I think we do not sufficiently look at the competency which exists. Where poverty is permitted, how often do you see godliness with contentment. You cannot always say of riches, "Godliness with riches is great gain." The blessing of the Lord turns every possession into wealth. Children, when blessed by God, are a heritage from the Lord. Friends, when blessed by God, are as so many ministers and servants and priests of God to us. Money, when blessed by God, instead of being the root of all evil, is the source and means of much good. Honour and reputation, when blessed by God, instead of being traps and snares and stumbling blocks, are an exalted position upon which light may shine for the good of others, and the glory of our Father in heaven. Some things wrapped up in the blessing of the Lord are of priceless value. He who has the blessing of salvation is rich indeed. To acquire good things is to prevent all misgiving as to the right of possession. Temporal prosperity, if chosen for you by your Father in heaven, is not only a condition in which you may lawfully be found, but one in which you may feel secure and safe. In this state there is no suspicion as to the power of keeping what we have, and there is no alloy in the use or enjoyment. Providence over both material and spiritual things is fully co-operative with a man whose position is created by the blessing of the Lord. He can look his fellow-men in the face concerning his prosperity—even his temporal prosperity—and can speak of all he has without bringing a blush upon his cheek. Then try to get God's blessing upon everything—body, soul, and spirit; upon the husband, upon the wife, and upon the children, upon your means of livelihood, upon your property, upon your friendships and connections, and upon all your pursuits. (*Samuel Martin.*)

Ver. 23. It is as sport to a fool to do mischief.—*Moral phases of life*:—Human life has its spiritual and moral as well as its material and intellectual side. Five things in these verses of great moral significance. I. **WEALTH MAKING HAPPY.** Great temporal possessions are often the occasion of mental suffering. They awaken in the mind harassing cares, painful anxieties, and distressing suspicions. Wealth reached in harmony with the will of God, and employed in the service of benevolence and truth, has no sorrow, but tends to happiness in many ways. II. **MISCHIEF DONE IN SPORT.** There is an innocent sport. The sport meant here is that which does injury to the reputation, the property, the peace, the comforts of others. Sport that turns the serious into ridicule, that makes merry in deeds of nefarious wickedness. It is the fool that makes a mock at sin; to the wise man sin is too grave a matter to laugh at. III. **JUSTICE DONE TO ALL.** The anticipation of the righteous, and the forebodings of the wicked, shall both one day be realised. There is at times in every guilty conscience a fearful looking for of judgment. There is, on the other hand, in every godly soul a desire for a higher spiritual good. IV. **INDOLENCE CAUSING VEXATION.** Vinegar sets the teeth on edge, and smoke gives pain to the eyes. Both irritate and annoy, so an indolent messenger provokes his master. Laziness is vexatious. V. **CHARACTER REVEALED IN ITS ISSUES.** Good character prolongs life, and yields joy. The character of the wicked abbreviates life, and ends in ruin. How full is the Bible of human life! God has filled it with humanity in order that it might interest men, and improve them. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 24. The fear of the wicked, it shall come upon him; but the desire of the righteous shall be granted.—*A contrast*:—Scripture is a book full of the strongest contrasts. As in the work of an eminent painter, it contains light and shade. I. **WHO ARE THE WICKED?** We must not confine our ideas to the notoriously profligate. As long as a man is uncalled of God, and unregenerate, he is a stranger to all that is truly spiritual, and knows not the true nature of sin. Malachi describes the righteous thus, "He serveth God." He describes the wicked

thus, "He serveth Him not." The wicked servant "hid his Lord's talent in the earth." In the description of the sheep and goats, there is no mark of profligacy fixed on the goats. The great besetting sin of the unregenerate man is pride. Neglect of Christ, contempt of Christ, impenitence, carnality, and worldliness, God declares to be the great condemning sin of the world. Whoever and whatever the wicked may be, they must have their fear. II. THE RIGHTEOUS AND THEIR DESIRE. Who are the righteous? They are the justified. They are the sanctified. A man trusting to his own righteousness cannot be a holy man. The very first elements of holiness are wanting in him—humiliation before God, real acquaintance with God, real desire after God. It is a great delusion to imagine that a justified soul is not also sanctified. The activity of spiritual life shows itself in spiritual desire. It wants pardon, peace, righteousness, happiness. What encouragement does the text give to these desires? There is no limit, no exception, no peradventure. "It shall be granted." (*J. Harrington Evans, M.A.*) *The desire of the righteous granted*.—I. WHO IS THE RIGHTEOUS MAN? 1. He whom God counts so. 2. He whom God makes so, by possessing him with a principle of righteousness. 3. He who is practically righteous. II. WHAT ARE THE DESIRES OF THE RIGHTEOUS MAN? 1. Communion with God. 2. Enjoyment of holy ordinances. 3. The personal presence of the Lord (Phil. i. 23). III. WHAT IS MEANT BY GRANTING THESE DESIRES? (Psa. cxlv. 19; xxvii. 4; xxi. 2.) The desires of God and the righteous agree together. They are the life of all their prayers, and God delights in these. (*John Bunyan.*) *The desire of the righteous*.—Because it is a righteous desire it is safe for God to grant it. It would be neither good for the man himself, nor for society at large, that such a promise should be made to the unrighteous. Let us keep the Lord's commands, and He will rightfully have respect to our desires. When righteous men are left to desire unrighteous desires, they will not be granted to them. But then these are not their real desires; they are their wanderings or blunders; and it is well that they should be refused. Their gracious desires shall come before the Lord, and He will not say them nay. Does the Lord deny us our requests for a time? Let the promise for to-day encourage us to ask again. Has He denied us altogether? We will thank Him still, for it always was our desire that He should deny us if He judged a denial to be best. As to some things, we ask very boldly. Our chief desires are for holiness, usefulness, likeness to Christ, preparedness for heaven. These are the desires of grace rather than of nature—the desires of the righteous man rather than of the mere man. God will not stint us in these things, but will do for us exceeding abundantly. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Fears realised and hopes fulfilled*.—The difference between the righteous and the wicked lies not in the existence of these emotions of fear and hope now, but in their issue at last. In each character there are the same two emotions now; in each, at the final reckoning, one of these emotions will be realised and the other disappointed. It is not difficult to ascertain what are the chief fears and desires of a wicked man. Cleaving to his sins, he is in enmity against God. The terrors of the Lord glance from time to time like lightning in his conscience. He fears the wrath of God, and the punishment of sin. What does he desire or hope? His desire for time is the indulgence of his appetites; his desire for eternity is that there should be no God, or at least, that He should not be just to mark iniquity. What becomes of the fears of the righteous? What becomes of the darkness when the daylight shines? When Christ comes, His coming shall be morning. The saints are subject to fears. The promise to believers is not that they shall never fear; it is that the thing feared will never come upon them. Their desire is that they may be pardoned through the blood of Christ, and renewed after His image. When these are the desires of our souls, how safe we are! (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Look to the end: a contrast*.—The wisest saying of a certain heathen philosopher was, "Look to the end." God asks, "What will ye do in the end?" We say, "All is well that ends well," which is true if it ends everlastingly well. The text points to the issue, the upshot, the end, of two different classes of men—the wicked and the righteous; it indicates as well as expresses the "end of the wicked"—his hopes perish, his fears come upon him; the "end of the righteous"—his fears are dispelled, his hopes are consummated and realised. What a contrast! If the man hoped for nothing beyond success, prosperity, long life, fortune, fame, distinction, position, rank, renown, pleasure; when he has got them he hath his reward, what he sought, and what he desired. And now what has he left? "Vanity of vanities," if all ends here. Often such a man's hope comes to an end with reference to this world only. They try to make hope for

themselves; but self-made hopes are but vain hopes. And such a man's fears are realised and accomplished. The boldest, most hardened, most sensual men, have their fears. What is a man's fear, when at last it comes upon a man? And there is the contrast in both these respects. The fears of the righteous shall all vanish. Righteous men cannot but have fears, and they are full of fears. The reward of his fears is, that they shall not come upon him. The desires of the righteous shall be granted. They may be, because they are kept in harmony with God's will, and the righteous stand in God's favour. (*H. Stowell, M.A.*)

Ver. 27. The fear of the Lord prolongeth days.—*Long life a promised blessing:*—We may wish for one another long life. Every one wishes it for himself. It is a mistake to regard this wish as an infirmity. Strong love of life is not necessarily sinful. 1. Long life is distinctly promised in Scripture as a blessing to God's people, both in the Old and New Testaments. 2. See why long life is a blessing. Because God rewards the good works of His people. He enables them to do good works, and rewards their work. The reward is not "salvation" but "glory." Life, like health, intellect, influence, is a talent, lent to us for our Master's service and our own profit; the greater the loan the larger the profit; the longer it is in trust, the fuller the results. There are difficulties in the way of accepting this truth. One is the seemingly contradictory language of Scripture on the subject. Some passages speak of early departure as a blessing. This is true only in special cases. And we must distinguish between things good and desirable in themselves, and things which become so by God's appointment. Another objection is this—Admitting that long life is a blessing, and a promised blessing, still we do not see the fulfilment of the promise. We see young saints departing, and old sinners remaining. In reply it may be urged that, if we could take the average of life, we should find it to be in favour of godly men. And the exceptions to the rule are more apparent than real. In many cases we see only the pious death, we are not acquainted with the whole previous life. It may be that the good man, whose early death so distresses and perplexes us, has, in early life, deserved that his days should have been thus shortened. And the cases of early death are simply exceptions to a generally working law. 3. What practical bearing shall this truth have upon our lives? We have rescued this text from the strained interpretation of those who do not look on long life as in itself a blessing. We have learned the true meaning and use of this longing after life which all men feel. It is no small gain to our peace of mind, when we can see that this love of life is not always an infirmity or a sin, but that the Christian may lawfully desire long life, as a longer time of working and suffering for Christ. And such a lawful desire for long life gives the strongest motive for rightly using life as it passes. 4. The tendency of vice is to shorten men's days. The text implies that, as life is a talent given to be rightly used, so, if abused, it is taken away from the possessor. We desire a longer life for the ungodly and careless, because we know that life is an opportunity for salvation; we would give the wicked further chance of repentance. (*Abp. W. C. Magee.*) *The fear of the Lord prolongeth days:*—There is no doubt about it. The fear of the Lord leads to virtuous habits, and these prevent that waste of life which comes of sin and vice. The holy rest which springs out of faith in the Lord Jesus also greatly helps a man when he is ill. Every physician rejoices to have a patient whose mind is fully at ease. Worry kills, but confidence in God is like healing medicine. We have therefore all the arrangements for long life, and if it be really for our good, we shall see a good old age, and come to our graves as shocks of corn in their season. Let us not be overcome with sudden expectation of death the moment we have a finger-ache, but let us rather expect that we may have to work on through a considerable length of days. And what if we should soon be called to the higher sphere? Certainly there would be nothing to deplore in such a summons, but everything to rejoice in. Living or dying we are the Lord's. If we live, Jesus will be with us; if we die, we shall be with Jesus. The truest lengthening of life is to live while we live, wasting no time, but using every hour for the highest ends. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 28. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.—*On hopes and disappointments:*—I. WE ARE NOT TO EXPECT PERMANENCE IN OUR ACQUISITIONS. On the lot of some men Providence is pleased to bestow a longer continuance of prosperity than on that of others. But as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. Human life never

stands still for any long time. It is by no means a fixed and steady object, like a mountain or rock. Nor is it a still, smooth stream with the same constant tenor. Amid such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future? To faults all are subject, to troubles all are exposed. To look for entire exemption from faults or troubles is to court disappointment. We must not, however, sadden the present hour by dwelling on the thoughts of future disappointment. What is given us, let us cheerfully enjoy, and render thanks to Him who bestows it. Virtue, conjoined with prudence, may reasonably afford the prospect of good days to come. II. WE ARE NOT TO EXPECT, FROM OUR INTERCOURSE WITH OTHERS, ALL THAT SATISFACTION WHICH WE FONDLY WISH. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs we are closely interwoven with one another. These associations open a field within which our wishes and expectations find an ample range. Among persons of all characters and descriptions many an expectation must perish, and many a disappointment be endured. All are jealous of the high pretensions of others. Hence the endless mortifications which the vain and self-conceited suffer. Hence the spleen and resentment which is so often breaking forth, disturbing the peace of society and involving it in crimes and miseries. Were expectations more moderate they would be more favourably received. Did we more rarely attempt to push ourselves into notice the world would more readily allow us, nay, sometimes assist us to come forward. In the closer connections which men form of intimate friendship and domestic life there is still more reason for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleasure of perfect sympathy and agreements of feelings; but, at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain. From trifling misunderstandings, arising from the most frivolous causes, spring much of the misery of social and domestic life. III. WE ARE NOT TO EXPECT CONSTANT GRATITUDE FROM THOSE WHOM WE HAVE MOST OBLIGED AND SERVED. Grateful sensations for favours received are very generally felt. When no strong passions counteract these sensations, grateful returns are generally intended, and often are actually made. But then our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. Many circumstances, it is to be remembered, tend to cool the grateful emotion. Time always deadens the memory of benefits. As benefits conferred are sometimes underrated by those who receive them, they are sometimes overvalued by those who confer them. On persons of light and careless minds no moral sentiment makes any deep impression. With the proud spirit, which claims everything as its due, gratitude is in a great measure incompatible. On the other hand—IV. WHATEVER COURSE THE AFFAIRS OF THE WORLD TAKE, THE GOOD MAN MAY JUSTLY HOPE TO ENJOY PEACE OF MIND. To the sceptic and the profligate this will be held as a very inconsiderable object of expectation and hope. But surely the peace of an approving conscience is one of the chief ingredients of human happiness, if it be tempered with true humility, and regulated by Christian faith! He, whose study it is to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man, will have, in every state of fortune, a ground of hope which may justly be denominated gladness. He has always somewhat to rest upon for comfort. V. A GOOD MAN HAS GROUND TO EXPECT THAT ANY EXTERNAL CONDITION INTO WHICH, IN THE COURSE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS, HE MAY PASS, SHALL, BY MEANS OF VIRTUE AND WISDOM, BE RENDERED, IF NOT PERFECTLY AGREEABLE, YET TOLERABLY EASY TO HIM. The inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. The wise and good man hopes to find, or make, his state tolerable to himself. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found. And the spirit of man will long sustain his infirmities. VI. WE HAVE GROUND TO EXPECT, FROM THE ORDINARY COURSE OF HUMAN AFFAIRS, THAT IF WE PERSEVERE IN STUDYING TO DO OUR DUTY TOWARDS GOD AND MAN, WE SHALL MEET WITH THE ESTEEM, THE LOVE, AND CONFIDENCE OF THOSE WHO ARE AROUND US. In regard to moral qualifications the world is ready to do justice to character. No man is hurt by hearing his neighbour esteemed a worthy and honourable man. The basis of all lasting reputation is laid in moral worth. Great parts and endowments may sparkle for a while in the public eye. Candour and fairness never fail to attract esteem and trust. The world commonly judges soundly in the end. The good man is likely to possess many friends and well-wishers, and to have few enemies. This subject, in its treatment, has been limited to what the righteous man has to

hope for in the ordinary course of the world. But it has to be added that there is a hope laid up for him in heaven. He knows that "in due season he shall reap if he faint not." For here, or yonder, his hope is perpetual gladness. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The hope of the righteous*:—The righteous here meant are those right with God. I. ITS FOUNDATION IS GOOD: "The righteous is an everlasting foundation" (ver. 25), therefore not swept away, as too often the hopes of the wicked. II. "THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL NEVER BE MOVED" (ver. 30). Confidence in this brings gladness to the Christian's heart. III. NO REMOVAL BY DEATH FROM GOD. The character they bear is a security against death. "Righteousness delivereth from death" (ver. 2). IV. THE FACT THAT THE RIGHTEOUS HAVE AN ALMIGHTY KEEPER AND PROVIDER MAKES THEIR HOPE ONE OF GLADNESS. "The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish" (ver. 3). V. Thus we see "THE LABOUR OF THE RIGHTEOUS TENDETH TO LIFE" (ver. 16). Careful, thoughtful, systematic in whatever employment he chooses, he so works that the labour itself promotes life. VI. Thus another reason why the hope of the righteous is gladness is the assurance: "THE DESIRE OF THE RIGHTEOUS SHALL BE GRANTED." VII. Thus another reason for his gladness: "THE LIPS OF THE RIGHTEOUS FEED MANY" (ver. 21). The righteous man, being a student of the Word of God, and treasuring His precepts in the heart, is able to employ his lips in feeding many. VIII. IN THE USE OF HIS LIPS TO BLESS OTHERS ANOTHER REASON IS FOUND FOR HIS GLADNESS: "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable" (ver. 32). The right words are spoken to the helpfulness of others and to the glory of God. IX. A final reason for the hope of the righteous bringing gladness is found in THAT HIS RESOURCES ARE UNFAILING: "The mouth of the righteous man is a well of life" (ver. 11). He has in himself a living well, and a well as drawn from is life-giving. Such is the assurance of the Master: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (*John vi. 63.*) (*G. H. Morss.*) *The hope of the righteous best*:—The expectation of the man who has his portion in this life is continually deteriorating; for every hour brings him nearer to the loss of all his treasures. But "the good hope through grace" is always approaching its realities, and therefore grows with the lapse of time more valuable and more lively. As it is spiritual in its quality, and heavenly in its object, it does not depend on outward things, and is not affected with the decays of nature. Like the Glastonbury thorn, it blossoms in the depth of winter. The hope of the one is a treasure out at interest which is continually augmenting; that of the other resembles stock, the capital of which has been continually invaded, until the last pound is ready to be consumed. (*H. G. Salter.*) *The hopes of the righteous, and of the wicked*:—No subject is of so much importance to man as religion. On no subject is it so desirable that right views should be possessed. Yet in religion to what extremes of formalism and folly, absurdity and asceticism, men proceed. Multitudes identify religion with a tiresome routine of forms and ceremonies. And many build their hopes of heaven on the groundwork of austerities. In one direction we see men placing religion in little more than a name, regardless of all the duties and dispositions and devotions of which it consists. In another direction our attention is arrested by people who are so ascetic as to think it sinful to smile. The text contains a powerful corrective of all those false impressions of religion which moody and soured examples of it may have produced. I. THE CHARACTER DEPICTED. The righteous. Not one who fulfils every requirement of God's law; nor one strictly honest in dealing with his fellow-men. If sinful man is to be righteous before his Maker, he must be so—1. By Divine imputation. 2. By spiritual renovation. 3. By habitual practice. We demand a lustrous manifestation of probity as well as piety. Good works are as essential to salvation as a sound creed and a changed heart. II. THE DIVINE POSSESSION OF THIS CHARACTER. We are justified in describing this hope as Divine, because—1. It has a Divine Author. 2. A Divine foundation. 3. A Divine tendency. III. THE BLESSED FRUIT OF THIS DIVINE POSSESSION. Gladness. IV. THE AWFUL CONTRAST WHICH THE TEXT PRESENTS. A contrast in character, and in destiny. (*E. Dewhurst.*)

Ver. 29. *The way of the Lord is strength to the upright.*—*The two-fold aspect of the Divine working*:—The words "shall be" in the second clause are supplementary and unnecessary. They destroy the completeness of the antithesis between the two halves of the verse. It is the same way which is strength to one man and ruin to another, and the moral nature of the man determines which it shall be to him. I. PUT CLEARLY THE MEANING AND BEARING OF THESE WORDS. "The way of

the Lord" means religion, considered as the way in which God desires a man to walk. But here it means the road in which God walks Himself, the solemn footsteps of God through creation, providence and history. To many modern thinkers the whole drift and tendency of human affairs affords no sign of a person directing these. This ancient teacher had keener ears. But not only does the expression point to the operation of a personal Divine will in human affairs, but it conceives of that operation as one, a uniform and consistent whole. It is "the way." It is a grand unity. A man can know about this way, though it may be hard to understand. It is all on the side of the good; it is all against every form of evil. God's actions do not change, but a man's character determines which aspect of them he sees, and has to experience. The word "strength" is used in a somewhat archaic signification, that of a "stronghold." Hebrew is "fortress." This "way of the Lord" is like a castle for the shelter of the shelterless good man; but a castle is a frowning menace to besiegers or enemies. II. ILLUSTRATE AND APPLY THE PRINCIPLES TAUGHT HERE. 1. The order of the universe is such that righteousness is life, and sin is death. On the whole, things do work so that goodness is blessedness, and badness is ruin. What modern phraseology calls "laws of nature," the Bible calls "the way of the Lord," and the manner in which these help a man who conforms to them, and hurt or kill him if he does not, is an illustration on a lower level of the principle of our text. 2. In our physical life, as a rule, virtue makes strength, sin brings punishment. 3. In higher regions, on the whole, goodness makes blessedness, and evil brings ruin. All the power of God's universe, and all the tenderness of God's heart, are on the side of the man who does right. All things serve the soul that serves God, and all war against him who wars against his Maker. 4. This will be made more evident in the future. It is possible that the one manifestation of God in a future life may be in substance the same, and yet that it may produce opposite effects upon oppositely disposed souls. People speak of rewards and punishments as if they were given and inflicted by simple Divine volition, and did not stand in any necessary connection with holiness on the one hand, or with sin on the other. 5. The very crown of the ways of God, the work of Christ, and the record of it in the gospel, have most eminently this double aspect. God meant nothing but salvation for the whole world when He sent us this gospel. We may make of that gospel a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offence." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 31. *The mouth of the just bringeth forth wisdom.—Piety a peculiar ornament to the aged:—*I. WHO MAY PROPERLY BE CALLED OLD PEOPLE? Old and young are relative terms, and admit of different significations. Children always think their parents are old. They are old who have grey hairs here and there upon them. The distinction in ages has always been considered as an important distinction by all mankind, who have marked it by some peculiar symptoms or visible effects which the different periods of life produce on the body or on the mind. God leaves it to every individual to judge for himself when the precepts to the young bind him, and when the precepts to the old bind him. Every one should judge justly. II. WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE PIETY OF OLD PEOPLE? It is called their righteousness. Righteousness is often used in Scripture to denote holiness in heart and life. Righteousness is true holiness, which is the moral excellence of all moral beings, and the essence of all vital piety in mankind. The piety of old people implies two things. 1. Their cordial belief in the great truths of the gospel. All true piety is founded on the knowledge, the belief, and the love of the great and peculiar truths of the gospel. 2. The practice of the duties, as well as the belief of the doctrines, of the gospel. It is generally true that aged Christians have lived a long time in the way of holiness and obedience to the Divine commands. The promises of the gospel are expressly made to those who overcome, to those who continue in well-doing, and to those who endure unto the end. Internal piety always produces external obedience to the precepts of the gospel. Though the oldest Christians never arrive at sinless perfection in this life, yet they generally grow in grace as they grow in years. Though the piety of the young and that of the old are essentially alike, yet the piety of the aged has a specific and superior excellence. III. IN WHAT RESPECTS IS THE PIETY OF THE AGED THEIR PECULIAR ORNAMENT? Piety adorns the hoary head, and spreads a peculiar beauty over the aged. 1. Their piety appears with peculiar purity. Through the sanctified discipline of a life-experience. Aged piety is tried, purified, refined piety. 2. Their piety hides the infirmities and imperfections which are peculiar to their age. They

often become more amiable in their age than they were in their full vigour and activity. 3. Their piety renders them useful, when they would otherwise be useless and burdensome to the world. They are still capable of serving God and their generation, by their examples, their instructions, their admonitions, and their prayers. The pious examples and instructions of aged parents are often tenfold more valuable to their families than all the wealth and respectability they can bestow upon them. 4. Their piety makes them happy in themselves and pleasant to others. Improvement. 1. There are many more old people than are usually reckoned such. 2. They ought always to be treated with respect. 3. The want of piety is a peculiar blemish in the character of the aged. 4. Aged saints have great reason to be thankful for what God has done for them. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*)

The speech of the righteous and the wicked compared:—Solomon attaches great importance to the power of the tongue to work good or ill. I. THE SPEECH OF THE GOOD MAN IS VALUABLE, THAT OF THE OTHER IS WORTHLESS. Solomon brings the heart and the tongue into comparison, rather than the tongue of each, to express the idea that speech is always the outcome and exponent of the heart. II. THE SPEECH OF THE GOOD MAN IS NOURISHING, THAT OF THE OTHER IS KILLING. How one soul can nourish and invigorate another by the language of truth and love. The spiritual destroyer of humanity makes corrupt words his wings to bear him through the world. III. THE SPEECH OF THE GOOD MAN IS WISE, THAT OF THE OTHER IS FOOLISH. The words of him whose intellect is under the teachings of God, and whose heart is in vital sympathy with Him, are wise words. The policies propounded by the wicked may seem wise at first, but time always exposes their folly, and brings its disciples to confusion and shame. IV. THE SPEECH OF THE GOOD MAN IS ACCEPTABLE, THAT OF THE OTHER IS PERVERSE. The words of truth are always acceptable to God, as they are also to all thoughtful and candid men. There is a "frowardness" in the utterances of the wicked that is distasteful to all consciences, and repugnant to the heart of God and the good. What are the elements of good moral speech? Sincerity and purity. By sincerity is meant the strict correspondence of the language with the sentiments of the heart. By purity is meant the strict correspondence of those sentiments with the principles of everlasting right. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XI.

VER. 1. A false balance is an abomination to the Lord.—*The heinousness of injustice done under the pretence of equity:*—The proverbs of this book are often figurative, and of a very strong and extensive meaning. The words of the text imply the odiousness, not only of false weights or balances, but likewise of all things of the like nature and consequence; of all unfair and unfaithful actions; of all unequal and injurious proceedings. There are two kinds of injustice; the one open and barefaced, the other secret and disguised, so cunningly clothed and adorned, that it appears like justice itself. The text manifests the odiousness of this latter kind. A false balance is always made use of under the plausible pretence of doing justice, though it has the contrary effect. This latter kind of injustice is more abominable than the other. (1) In its nature. This is a complication of crimes and mischiefs, the other is simple injustice. This is always vile and ungenerous. (2) In its consequences. We have far less security against this kind of unjust actors, so that the mischiefs of it are more certain and inevitable. Force can repel force, but it cannot repel treachery. God does, in a great measure, reserve cases of this nature for His own peculiar tribunal in the great and dreadful day. This kind of injustice is an "abomination" to Him; the word implies an extraordinary degree of hatred and detestation. (*Laurence Echard, A.M.*)

Uprightness:—I. UPRIGHTNESS PORTRAYED. 1. Commercial integrity (ver. 1). There is an inspection of weights and measures going on daily of which few are cognisant (*Lev. xix. 35, 36*). The God of heaven is a God of detail. 2. Lowliness of spirit (ver. 2). Uprightness is not uprightness. 3. Integrity of purpose (ver. 3). "The crooked, winding policy of ungodly men," says Scott, "involves them in increasing wickedness." 4. A right estimate of wealth (ver. 4). The upright man will consider how his gains will look in the day of judgment. II. UPRIGHTNESS REWARDED. 1. The favour of the Lord (ver. 1). 2. Guidance (ver. 3). He who

does right will be rightly led (John vii. 17; Psal. cxii. 4). 3. Deliverance (ver. 4). The respect of others (ver. 10). 5. The good of others (ver. 11). (*H. Thorne.*)

The false balance.—Text taken in literal and material sense, as applying to that great world of fraud and imposition and over-reaching in which we live, and the subject is our duty as Christians in the midst of it. I. THE MANIFEST TRUTH OF THE ASSERTION OF THE TEXT, AND THE GROUNDS ON WHICH IT RESTS. God is a God of justice. Truth, pure and unspotted, is the very essence of the Divine character. Wherever there is deceit in the world, wherever injury, wherever oppression, there is God's anger and loathing accompanying it. The false balance, which is an abomination to the Lord, where do we not see it around us? From the powerful guides of public opinion, each assuming to be written in the interest of justice and truth, but each, almost without exception, warping justice and truth by false statements, false inferences, predetermined conclusions, down to the petty fraud, in measure and weight, which you will find in any chance shop you enter, certain known and avowed avoidances or disguises of truth, are every day practised, and acquiesced in as inevitable. The evil is in every class. But the mischief is not universal. But Christian men and women sin by tacit acquiescence in these wrong things. II. HOW MAY WE BEST SEPARATE OURSELVES FROM, AND DISCOURAGE THE FALSE BALANCE, AND UPHOLD AND CLEAVE TO THE JUST WEIGHT? We must not begin with mere practical details. The secret of all wrong is the false balance within the heart; the real cheating begins there. Is our estimate of men and things which guides our action the real and true one, or some artificial one, that is altogether wrong, and leading us altogether wrong? Men who know what is right are sometimes mixed up with the system of fraud. Why? Because they will not let recognised religious principle hold the balance nor regulate the estimate formed of the relative importance of men and things. "I must think," such a man says, "as others think; I must do as others do." If we would get rid of the false balance without, and in our streets and markets, we must begin within ourselves. Were buyers honest, sellers would, by compulsion, be honest too. Here the fault begins. Practical suggestions: conscientiously regulate the bestowal of employment and patronage: there are certain signs by which even the dull of discernment may discern the tokens of fraud and pretension. Be not an admirer of the system of universal cheapness. (*Dean Alford.*) *Deception in business*.—Many are pleased at the dexterity with which they practise their deceptions. The fraud is undiscovered, and being undiscovered, is unfelt by those on whom it is practised, and what is never known and never felt can be no harm. So they think. But God sees it, and He estimates the action on no such principle; nor is it the principle on which you would estimate it were you the party defrauded. You have no idea, in your own case, of admitting that what is not missed is not lost; or that the cleverness of the fraud is any palliation of it. You do not think the better of the merchant with his "balances of deceit," that the unfairness of the balance is ingeniously concealed. You do not regard it as a compensation for the property abstracted from your plundered house or warehouse, that the impression of your keys has been adroitly obtained, or the mode of entrance skillfully devised and expertly executed. You do not approve the laws of ancient Sparta which, to encourage cleverness and sleight of hand, rewarded instead of punishing the youthful thief who could steal without detection. Depend upon it, if you plume yourself on the dexterity with which you have contrived and executed a plan for cozening your neighbour, it will be no palliation with God, nor will any amount of such dexterity produce any abatement of His sentence of condemnation. It is the moral principle, or want of principle, in which the evil lies, and the very measure of thought and contrivance expended for the purpose of ensuring success in the contravention of God's law, instead of diminishing, will serve to aggravate your guilt in His sight. The "abomination" will be only the more loathsome. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 2. *When pride cometh, then cometh shame.*—*Pride*.—I shall first describe to you the several kinds of pride among mankind, and show you their folly and wickedness; and, secondly, point out to you the beauty and advantage of their opposite virtue, humility. I. The vice of pride PUTS ON A GREAT VARIETY OF APPEARANCES, AND IS FOUND IN EVERY RANK AND CONDITION OF HUMAN LIFE. Pride of station claims our first notice. "Man being in authority," is too apt to be "proud at heart"; to be "puffed up" with this distinction; to consider himself as a being of a higher order than the rest of his fellow sinners; and to look upon those with

disdain who are lower in the scale of society than himself. But what do the Scriptures say to such a vain and foolish mortal as this? They tell him that "man will not long abide in honour, seeing he may be compared to the beast that perisheth." They tell him that "men of high degree are a lie; to be laid in the balance, they are altogether lighter than vanity." 2. Nor is the pride of birth less unreasonable than that of rank. Even a heathen in ancient times could see its absurdity, and say, "for as to family and ancestors, and what we have not done ourselves, we can scarcely call those things ours." 3. Of the same wicked and foolish character is pride of riches. Reason tells us that riches cannot give dignity of character, superiority of intellect, vigour of body, endowments of mind, peace of conscience, cheerfulness of heart, or any one of those advantages which form the chief blessings of life; and, therefore, are a very insufficient foundation for "pride of heart." 4. Pride of talent, and pride of learning, also ill become "man that is born of a woman." A disease, an accident, "a sudden terror," may overset the mind, and turn all our light into "utter darkness." Of the pride of beauty, in order to show its folly, it need only be said, in the language of inspiration, "surely all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, and the flower fadeth." 5. The pride of judgment, also, which is too often the pride of the young and ignorant, is of the like foolish description, and is equally rebuked by the Holy Scriptures. It is a common and a true observation, that those who know least generally imagine that they know most, and know best. 6. But, of all kinds of pride, spiritual pride, or the conceit and boast of being holier than others, is the worst description of this bad passion: most hateful to God, and most dangerous to our souls. II. Opposite, however, as the mid-day sun to "utter darkness," is THE CHARACTER GIVEN IN SCRIPTURE OF LOWLINESS OR HUMILITY: AND THE VIEW OF THE BLESSINGS WHICH ARE PROMISED UPON THOSE IN WHOM IT IS FOUND. "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." When we consider the nature of man, fallen and far gone from original righteousness, one might well think that men should of their own accord see the propriety, the necessity, of the grace of humility in their character. Our Lord has bound meekness and poverty of spirit upon our consciences by His injunctions, and encouraged our obedience to His injunctions by assuring us that "the meek and the poor in spirit shall inherit the kingdom of heaven." He has declared to us that those who "humble themselves shall be exalted"; and finally, to give the greatest possible weight and effect to what He said, He left us, in His own practice, the most perfect example of the graces which He enjoined to His followers: for "He made Himself of no reputation," &c. (R. Warner.)

The advent and evil of pride:—I. THE ADVENT OF PRIDE. Pride is inordinate self-appreciation. This feeling comes to a soul; it is not born in it. Infancy and childhood are free from it. How does it come? 1. By associating only with inferiors. 2. By practically ignoring the true standards of character. When we lose sight of the eternal law of rectitude, and judge ourselves only by the imperfect standards around us, pride is likely to come. 3. By a practical disregard to the majesty of God. The conscious presence of God humbles. II. THE EVIL OF PRIDE. "Then cometh shame." The man who has formed a false and exaggerated estimate of self must be disappointed one day. Man must always find his level; he must come to realities. 1. Shame of folly. The soul bursts with a sense of its own foolish estimate. 2. Shame of guilt. Pride is a wrong state of mind, and hence shame follows it. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

The shame of pride:—The haughty and overbearing conduct of Cardinal Wolsey created him many secret enemies, and it was his ostentation and love of power which caused him to lose the favour of his sovereign. Proud of his talents, his wealth, his position, his sole aim was to raise himself still higher, all his actions being directed to his own aggrandisements; and this eagerness lay at the root of his downfall, it being impossible for him to please Henry in the matter of the divorce without losing all hope of the popedom. He felt severely the shame of his first disgrace, and offered to surrender both office and wealth to avert the king's displeasure; but, being allowed to retire to his archbishopric, he again excited the envy of his political rivals by his pride and love of show, and, being arrested for high treason, the whilom leader of the State died broken-hearted on his journey to London. *Pride*:—Among all the vices against which Solomon has cautioned us (and he has scarce left one untouched), there is none upon which he animadvert with more severity, or to which he more frequently recalls our attention, than the vice of pride; for which there may be many reasons assigned, but, more particularly, two seem to deserve our consideration. 1. The

first is the extensiveness of the sin. Other vices tyrannise over particular ages, and triumph in particular countries. Rage is the failing of youth, and avarice of age; revenge is the predominant passion of one country, and inconstancy the characteristic of another; but pride is the native of every country, infects every climate, and corrupts every nation. 2. The second reason may be drawn from the circumstances of the preacher. Pride was probably a crime to which Solomon himself was most violently tempted, since he was placed in every circumstance that could expose him to it. He was a king absolute and independent, and by consequence surrounded with sycophants ready to second the first motions of self-love, to comply with every proposal, and flatter every failing. But Solomon had not only the pride of royalty to suppress, but the pride of prosperity, of knowledge, and of wealth. I. THE NATURE OF PRIDE, WITH ITS ATTENDANTS AND CONSEQUENCES. Pride, simply considered, is an immoderate degree of self-esteem, or an over-value set upon a man by himself, and, like most other vices, is founded originally on an intellectual falsehood. But this definition sets this vice in the fairest light, and separates it from all its consequences, by considering man without relation to society, and independent of all outward circumstances. Pride, thus defined, is only the seed of that complicated sin against which we are cautioned in the text. In speculation pride may be considered as ending where it began, and exerting no influences beyond the bosom in which it dwells; but in real life pride will always be attended with kindred passions, and produce effects equally injurious to others, and destructive to itself. 1. He that overvalues himself will undervalue others, and he that undervalues others will oppress them. Pride has been able to harden the heart against compassion, and stop the ears against the cries of misery. It makes masters cruel and imperious, and magistrates insolent and partial. It produces contempt and injuries, and dissolves the bond of society. Nor is this species of pride more hurtful to the world than destructive to itself. The oppressor unites heaven and earth against him. 2. He that sets too high a value upon his own merits will, of course, think them ill-rewarded with his present condition. He will endeavour to exalt his fortune and his rank above others, in proportion as his deserts are superior to theirs. Once fired with these notions, he will attempt to increase his fortune and enlarge his sphere; and how few there are that prosecute such attempts with innocence, a very transient observation will sufficiently inform us. To pride, therefore, must be ascribed most of the fraud, injustice, violence, and extortion, by which wealth is frequently acquired. 3. Another concomitant of pride is envy, or the desire of debasing others. A proud man is uneasy and dissatisfied, while any of those applauses are bestowed on another, which he is desirous of himself. 4. Another consequence of immoderate self-esteem is an insatiable desire of propagating in others the favourable opinion he entertains of himself. He therefore tortures his invention for means to make himself conspicuous, and to draw the eyes of the world upon him. But for the most part it is ordered by Providence that the schemes of the ambitious are disappointed, so that "still when pride cometh, then cometh shame, but with the lowly is wisdom." II. SOME OF THE USUAL MOTIVES TO PRIDE, AND HOW LITTLE THEY CAN BE PLEADED IN EXCUSE OF IT. A superior being that should look down upon the disorder and corruption of our world, that should observe the shortness of our lives, the weakness of our bodies, the continual accidents, or injuries, to which we are subject; the violence of our passions, the irregularity of our conduct, and the transitory state of everything about us, would hardly believe there could be among us such vice as pride. Yet so it is, that however weak or wicked we may be, we fix our eyes on some other that is represented by our self-love to be weaker, or more wicked, than ourselves, and grow proud upon the comparison. Another common motive to pride is knowledge, a motive equally weak, vain, and idle, with the former. Learning indeed, imperfect as it is, may contribute to many great and noble ends, and may be called in to the assistance of religion. But how little reason have we to boast of our knowledge, when we only gaze and wonder at the surface of things? When the wisest and most arrogant philosopher knows not how a grain of corn is generated, or why a stone falls to the ground? But were our knowledge far greater than it is, let us yet remember that goodness, not knowledge, is the happiness of man! There is another more dangerous species of pride, arising from a consciousness of virtue; so watchful is the enemy of our souls, and so deceitful are our own hearts, that too often a victory over one sinful inclination exposes us to be conquered by another. This kind of pride is generally accompanied with great uncharitableness, and

severe censures of others, and may obstruct the great duty of repentance. III. **THE AMIABLENESS AND EXCELLENCE OF HUMILITY.** To evince beyond opposition the excellence of this virtue, we may observe that the life of our Lord was one continued exercise of humility. (*John Taylor, LL.D.*) *Pride leading to shame:*—Tirmond, one of the Czar's ablest surgeons, and to whom he was much attached, having died, his widow married a young barber from Dantzic, who was somewhat more expert in gallantry than in surgery; as he became very wealthy by this marriage, he made a great figure at Moscow. Being one day sent for by the Czar, he went to court in a magnificent dress, and in one of his elegant carriages. Peter examined him, and roughly told him he was a blockhead, and immediately called in a troop of valets and peasants, whom he ordered him instantly to shave. The gentleman barber was under the necessity of obeying, to the great amusement of the whole court, and with the same parade in which he had arrived, he was then permitted to return. (*Christian Weekly.*) *Proud and lowly:*—Pride consists in an immoderate self-esteem, and places its happiness in esteem and honour from others. No sin is more foolish than this, it springs from ignorance of God, of ourselves and other men, and by the very means which it uses for the accomplishments of its ends, ensures disappointment. In seeking glory it finds disgrace. Pride made Nebuchadnezzar a brute. It destroyed Herod with worms. It turned Lucifer into Beelzebub. By other sins, man rebels against God; by pride he usurps His crown and dignity. No wonder, then, that God looks up all those that are proud, and abaseth them. Humble men think of themselves as they ought to think. They desire that God may be honoured, even at the expense of their own honour. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 3. **The integrity of the upright shall guide them.**—*Integrity the best guide both in religious inquiries and in moral conduct:*—The policy of the world, like the world itself, is fluctuating and deceitful. Uncertain both in its objects and its means, it knows nothing of that steadfastness which religious principle communicates both to mind and conduct. The shifts and windings of those who are guided by no higher principles than those of pride and avarice would be truly ludicrous if they were not accompanied with serious mischief. Integrity, originating in the honest feelings of nature, exalted by piety, and cherished by serious reflections upon the ends of a probationary state, is our purest guide amidst all the temptations and difficulties, through all the vicissitudes and perplexities, both in thought and in action, which are continually occurring in the journey of life. By integrity is meant a steady determination to abide by the profession of important truth, however unfashionable, and to be upright in all transactions with the world, at whatever expense of temporary ease and interest. I. **INTEGRITY IS THE SUREST GUIDE TO EVERY PRACTICAL PURPOSE IN OUR RELIGIOUS INQUIRIES.** These inquiries have unfortunately been perplexed and mystified by the polemics of Churches and sects. Of course it is integrity, enlightened, to a certain degree, by a right education, that is meant. Go to the Bible with the sincere desire of gaining the knowledge of practical and consolatory truths, without any sectarian bias, and it is impossible that you should err in anything that might affect your practice here, or your salvation hereafter. Your integrity will guide you in all that is essential. II. **INTEGRITY IS OUR BEST GUIDE IN OUR WORLDLY TRANSACTIONS, AS MEN AND AS MEMBERS OF SOCIETY.** It is the great solver of all moral difficulties. Whence do these originate? They are generated by that interference of complicated interests, which embarrasses and perverts the minds of those who have no settled principle to which they can refer amidst the ever-varying plans of worldly wisdom. Integrity, enlightened by the truths, and fortified by the promises of the gospel, admits of no hesitation on account of any temporary inconvenience, to which an honest conduct may expose us. In public concerns, the surest way to outwit cunning and artifice would be to fix only upon such objects as reason can indicate and conscience may approve. Truth, in the hands of wisdom and courage, has a commanding aspect, which would confound the subtle chicanery and pitiful arts of a selfish and low-minded diplomacy. And in private transactions between man and man it holds equally true that enlightened integrity, acting with perseverance upon a settled plan, ultimately gains the very end by upright means which in the cunning and dishonest fail a thousand times for once that they succeed. Integrity makes a man rich in character, and that ensures him the best chance of gaining earthly success and wealth. (*Jas. Lindsay, D.D.*) *On integrity as the guide of life:*—A man of integrity is one who makes it his constant rule to follow the road of duty according

as the Word of God and the voice of his conscience point it out to him. The upright man is guided by a fixed principle of mind. Hence you find him ever and everywhere the same. In what manner does such integrity serve as the guide of his life? To conduct ourselves in human affairs with wisdom and propriety is often a matter of no small difficulty. Amidst that variety of characters, of jarring dispositions, and of interfering interests, which is found among those with whom we have intercourse, we are frequently at a stand as to the part most prudent for us to choose. In public and in private life, the doubt started by the wise man frequently occurs. Who knoweth what is good for man in this life? In such situations as these, the principle of integrity interposes to give light and direction. The virtuous man has one oracle, to which he resorts in every dubious case. He consults his conscience. The principle of integrity will always, if we listen to it impartially, give a clear decision. 1. The guidance of integrity is the safest under which we can be placed. The road in which it leads us is, upon the whole, freest from dangers. The man of the world aims at higher things, and more rapid success, than the man of moderation and virtue. But, at the same time, he incurs greater risks and dangers. No calculation of probabilities can ensure safety to him who is acting a deceitful part. He who follows the guidance of integrity, walks in the high road, on which the light of the sun shines. The principle of integrity by no means excludes prudence in the conduct of life. It implies no improvident or thoughtless simplicity. 2. The path of integrity is the most honourable. Integrity is the foundation of all that is high in character among mankind. He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour will act with a dignity and boldness of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. That firmness which the consciousness of rectitude inspires gives vigour and force to his exertions on every great occasion. It adds double weight to all the abilities of which he is possessed. They who oppose him are obliged to honour him. Such a man is trusted and relied on, as well as esteemed. 3. The plan of conduct on which the man of integrity proceeds is the most comfortable, attended with the greatest satisfaction to his own mind. His reference of all his actions to Divine approbation furnishes another source of satisfaction and peace. 4. The man of integrity has in view the prospect of immortal rewards. True integrity will prove the truest wisdom both for this world and the next. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *Integrity a good guide*:—Nehemiah was brave and upright; and his integrity guided him to honour and renown, and his righteousness delivered his friends and their enterprise from disaster (Neh. vi. 10-16). Haman was perverse and wicked; his ways were crooked; he conspired to take away the lives of others; and on the gallows which he had set up for Mordecai he himself was hung: and so "the transgressor was taken in his own naughtiness" (Esther vii. 10).

Ver. 5. The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way.—*The Divine nature of righteousness*:—Not unreasonably this book of Proverbs charged with unspirituality. It is not a manual of devotion. It is not a setting forth of eternal principles of truth. It is a collection of homely aphorisms applicable to the practical life of man. But these proverbs rest upon spiritual principles, and they are saved from narrowness by the way in which they explain, amplify, and qualify each other. The great pervading principle of the book is righteousness, its Divine nature, and its blessed fruits. I. THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF THIS BOOK, AND OF ALL MORAL TEACHING. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap." This by the world is—1. Denied in practice. 2. Denied in theory. The theory is false that, live as you like, the result will be the same. It is contradicted by experience. It is inconsistent with the very being of a God. II. SPECIAL STATEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES. 1. "The righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way." Note the leading words. "Perfect," not faultless, but upright. Not consciously or intentionally reserving anything from God. "His righteousness." Not his own, but God's; yet made his own by free adoption of his will. "Its work." Not an arbitrary reward. 2. "Wicked fall by his own wickedness." Generally speaking, failure is worked for, and comes as payment. Apply to (1) Man's earthly life. (2) To man's spiritual life. (*W. R. Clarke, M.A.*) *Goodness required by God*:—The main characteristic of all heathen religions is that their gods do not demand righteousness, but certain outward and formal observances. Sacrifices must be offered to them, their vindictive temper must be propitiated, their anger averted; if the dues of the gods are paid, the stipulated quantity of corn and wine and oil, the tithes, the first-fruits, the animals for the altar, the tribute for the temple, then

the worshipper, who has thus discharged his obligations, may feel himself free to follow out his own tastes and inclinations. In the Roman religion, for example, every dealing with the gods was a strictly legal contract; the Roman general agreed with Jupiter or with Mars that if the battle should be won a temple should be built. It was not necessary that the cause should be right, or that the general should be good; the sacrifice of the wicked, though offered with an evil intent, was as valid as the sacrifice of the good. In either case the same amount of marble and stone, of silver and gold, would come to the god. In the Eastern religions not only were goodness and righteousness dissociated from the idea of the gods, but evil of the grossest kinds was definitely associated with them. The Phœnician deities, like those of the Hindoos, were actually worshipped with rites of murder and lust. Every vice had its patron god or goddess, and it was forgotten by priest and people that goodness could be the way of pleasing God, or moral evil a cause of offence to Him. Even in Israel, where the teaching of revelation was current in the proverbs of the people, the practice generally followed the heathen conceptions. All the burning protests of the inspired prophets could not avail to convince the Israelite that what God required was not sacrifice and offering, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him. Again and again we find that the high places were frequented, and the ritual supported by men who were sensual, unjust, and cruel. The Sabbath Day was kept, the feasts were duly observed, the priests were handsomely maintained, and there, it was supposed, the legitimate claims of Jehovah ceased. What more could He desire? This is surely the most impressive proof that the truth which is under consideration is far from being obvious. So far from treating the truth as a truism, our Lord in all His teaching laboured to bring it out in greater clearness, and to set it in the forefront of His message to men. He painted with exquisite simplicity and clearness the right life, the conduct which God requires of us, and then likened every one who practised this life to a man who builds his house on a rock, and every one who does not practise it to a man who builds his house on the sand. He declared, in the spirit of the Book of Proverbs, that teachers were to be judged by their fruits, and that God would estimate our lives not by what we professed to do, but by what we did; and He took up the very language of the book in declaring that every man should be judged according to his works. In every word He spoke He made it plain that goodness is what God loves, and that wickedness is what He judges and destroys. In the same way every one of the apostles insists on this truth with a new earnestness. St. John more especially reiterates it, in words which sound even more like a truism than the sayings of this book: "He that doeth righteousness, is righteous even as He is righteous"; and, "If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one also that doeth righteousness is begotten of Him." (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. The hope of unjust men perisheth.—*The terrible in human history*:—There are two terrible events in this text. I. **DEATH MEETING THE WICKED MAN.** "The wicked man dieth." 1. Death does not wait for reformation of character. 2. The greatest enemies of God and His universe are overcome. There is a stronger power than that of the wicked. II. **HOPE LEAVING THE HUMAN SOUL.** What is dearer to the soul than hope? The soul lives in and by hope. Shakespeare says, "The miserable hath no medicine, but only hope." When the wicked man dieth, he loses this hope. Hope of liberty, of improvement, of honour, of happiness. He dieth, and carrieth nothing away. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The hope of the wicked*:—Men derive almost the whole of their happiness from hope. The wicked man laughs at the righteous because he lives by hope; but the wicked man himself does the same. The present situation of the wicked man never yields him the pleasure which he wishes and expects; but there is ever something in view, in which, could he but obtain it, he would find rest. If his hopes are deferred, his heart is sick; if they are accomplished he is still unsatisfied; but he comforts himself with some other hope, like a child, who thinks he sees a rainbow on the top of a neighbouring hill, and runs to take hold of it, but sees it as far removed from him as before. Thus the life of a wicked man is spent in vain wishes and toils and hopes, till death kills at once his body, his hope, and his happiness. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 8. The righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh in his stead.—*Trouble in its relation to the righteous and the wicked*:—All men have

their troubles. The relation of the good and the bad to trouble is strikingly different. I. **THE RIGHTEOUS ARE GOING OUT OF TROUBLE.** The troubles of the righteous arise from physical infirmities, mental difficulties, secular anxieties, moral imperfections, social dishonesties, falsehoods, and bereavements. But the fact is, that they are being delivered out of these troubles. 1. Partially, they are being delivered out of trouble now. 2. Completely, they will be delivered out of all trouble at death. II. **THE WICKED ARE GOING INTO TROUBLE.** They are going deeper into trouble every step they take. They are forging thunderbolts and nursing storms. The trouble they are going into is unmitigated. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Retributive justice*:—Thus do these two classes change places in the dispensations of God. The same Providence often marks Divine faithfulness and retributive justice. The Israelites were delivered out of the trouble of the Red Sea; the Egyptians came in their stead. Mordecai was delivered from the gallows; Haman was hanged upon it. The noble confessors in Babylon were saved from the fire; their executioners were “slain” by it. Daniel was preserved from the lions; his accusers were devoured by them. Peter was snatched from death; his jailors and persecutors were condemned. Thus “precious in the sight of the Lord is” the life, no less than “the death, of his saints.” To what source but his own free and sovereign love can we trace this special estimation? (*C. Bridges.*) *The wicked cometh in his stead*:—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came unhurt out of the “burning fiery furnace”; whilst the men who cast them in were slain by the fierceness of the heat (*Dan. iii. 22-27.*) Daniel was taken up alive and uninjured out of the lions’ den; whilst the men who had accused him were cast into the same den, and the lions, which had not touched Daniel, “brake all their bones in pieces” before they reached “the bottom of the den” (*Dan. vi. 23, 24.*)

Ver. 9. An hypocrite with his mouth destroyeth his neighbour: but through knowledge shall the just be delivered.—*Hypocrisy and knowledge*:—The hypocrite is one who feigns to be what he is not—one whose life is a lie. Selfish, he wears the costume of benevolence; false, he speaks the language of sincerity and truth. I. **HYPOCRISY IS DESTRUCTIVE.** The hypocrite, by his deception, has often destroyed the reputation, the peace, and the soul of his neighbour. Hypocrisy—1. Implies the pernicious. A consciousness of wrongness within is the cause of all hypocrisy. 2. Employs the pernicious. Misrepresentations are its instruments. II. **KNOWLEDGE IS RESTORATIVE.** Knowledge here is in antithesis with hypocrisy. Real knowledge is truth, reality. It scatters the clouds of ignorance and error, and raises the soul to light, freedom, purity and blessedness. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The insincere*:—This verse may be understood with a reference to all insincere professions of friendship and good intentions—to all insinuating and flattering pretensions, adopted for the purpose of effecting a particular end. How many are there who, for objects of their own deceive others; no matter what the result may be to the deceived, provided the deceiver but accomplish his selfish aim. In religion, the hypocrite has a purpose. His religion is not real. He assumes the cloak to cover some secret design. The verse itself suggests the design—the undermining of the principles of others. He insinuates himself into confidence. The confidence increasing, he becomes by degrees more and more bold, till, by slow steps, he unsettles the principles, shakes the faith, dissipates the seriousness, and ruins the souls of others. Hypocrites are awful stumbling blocks. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 10. When it goeth well with the righteous, the city rejoiceth.—*The public conscience in relation to moral character*:—Down deep beneath the errors, follies, vanities of the community, there is a conscience. That conscience points evermore to the right and the just, as the needle to the pole. I. **THE PUBLIC CONSCIENCE IN RELATION TO THE RIGHTEOUS.** 1. Public conscience is gratified by the prosperity of the righteous. 2. Public conscience acknowledges the usefulness of the righteous. II. **PUBLIC CONSCIENCE IN RELATION TO THE WICKED.** 1. It rejoices in their ruin. 2. It acknowledges their mischief. The “mouth of the wicked”—the channel of impieties, falsehoods, impurities, and innumerable pernicious errors have caused in all ages, and is still causing, the overthrow of states. (*Homilist.*) *The tribute to righteousness*:—This is a tribute to righteousness which must come sooner or later. There is a heart in the city as well as in the individual man; a kind of civic personality as well as a narrow individuality. When principles of the highest morality govern the life of the city there is rejoicing everywhere, because

where righteousness is the blessing of God is, and the blessing of God maketh rich, and no sorrow is added to that infinite and tender benediction. It is singular indeed that even bad men rejoice when good principles are so received and applied as to revive commercial industry and commercial confidence, and create a healthy state of feeling as between nation and nation, and city and city. When the wicked man perishes there is shouting of gladness, although there may have been during his lifetime adulation and hypocritical compliment paid to him. The wicked man never did anybody any lasting good. He always took away more than he gave, and he never pronounced a kind word except with a stinging spirit, and even in his superficial benedictions there was nothing enduring, nothing solid and lasting in the comfort which he pretended to bestow. The wicked man imagines that he is popular, but his imagination is vain. He is only made use of, looked for in order that he may help in a time of emergency, or in some way be unconsciously debased to uses the full range and purpose of which he does not perceive. Every one is proud to recall the repute of a righteous man. It is like reminding others of gardens of beauty, orchards of delight, landscapes rich in all features of excellence and attractiveness; the name of the righteous is a name of health; it is breathed as with the fresh air of heaven; men delight to hear it and find their honour even in its repetition. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. The upright may be for a time opposed, but for a time only; the issue is certain; truth will prevail, and they who oppose the upright shall come to humiliation, if not to contrition, and to such a sense of injury inflicted upon the innocent as will elicit from them words of compunction, petitions, and supplications for pardon. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) **When the wicked perish, there is shouting.**—*Joy in the fate of the wicked*:—On the death of Henry III. of France, whose character was a contemptible mixture of weakness, folly, and vice, the Parisians, who had long held their king in distrust and contempt, gave themselves up to most disgraceful excesses of joy, and the Duchess of Montpensier ran about the streets crying, "Good news, good news! the tyrant is dead!" Robespierre was conveyed to the place of execution amid shouts and execrations of the populace, who were frantic with joy at the downfall of the tyrant, the women dancing about the procession in the most insane manner. There was great rejoicing in Ireland when it was known that James Carey, the informer, had been shot. (*J. L. Nye.*) When Mordecai triumphed over Haman, "the city of Shushan rejoiced and was glad" (*Esther viii. 15*). "When the wicked perish, there is shouting." When Athaliah was slain, "all the people of the land rejoiced" (*2 Kings xi. 20*).

Ver. 11. By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted.—*A political maxim*:—To the morals of men is imputed the public prosperity or misfortunes. By "upright" is meant, men of sufficient abilities for the stations which they fill, and of piety and resolution enough to discharge the duties of their places. 1. When righteous magistrates are in authority, good laws are enacted, and impartially administered; virtue meets with its encouragements and vice with its due restraints and punishments. 2. The faithful dispensers of the sincere Word of God must needs contribute very much to the happiness of the place where they live. Those who propagate the knowledge of God, and excite men to glorify Him, must in reason be esteemed the instruments of men's felicity. 3. Every upright man, of what station soever, is a blessing to the place where he lives, if he have so much of a public spirit and principle of humanity in him as to desire his neighbour's prosperity as well as his own; and if he be ready upon all reasonable occasions to do good offices to others, such a man is a good member of any civilised community. The other part of the text deals with a contrary cause and effect. 1. At the tribunals of justice, in trials of right and wrong, an unjust sentence has often proceeded from the mouth of a partial judge, a corrupt jury, or a false witness. 2. In dispensing the Divine Word, and treating of the mysteries and doctrines of religion, it is of most destructive consequences to the people, if the mouth of the wicked have the handling of them; for then the people will be sure to be divided by that religion which was designed to unite them, and be emboldened to disobey God by the authority of His own misinterpreted Word. Pure religion is certainly the very best cement of civil society, as mightily enforcing the duties of unity, peace, and love among men: but religion corrupted in the doctrines of faith and practice carries with it the seeds of endless strife and contention, and ministers occasion to continual debates and animosities. 3. In the daily affairs and

transactions of common life, the mouth of the wicked does much towards destroying the public good. If this be well demonstrated, it is a fair warning to all cities which are concerned for their own preservation, that they be very careful to increase the upright, and diminish the number of the wicked among them. Let us then exert ourselves, upon all just occasions, in the cause of truth, to the extermination of all that is contrary to it. So shall we both entitle ourselves and those whom we shall reduce from error to the gracious protection of God in this life present, and to His everlasting salvation in that which is to come. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *A good man a blessing to the city*:—When Hezekiah "wrought that which was good and right and truth before God," the Lord saved Jerusalem from the hand of every enemy, and made the city prosperous (2 Chron. xxxii. 22, 30.) But it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.—The men of Sodom and Gomorrah were foul of mouth; it was an open sepulchre; and, because of their sins, God overthrew the two cities (Gen. xix. 25).

Vers. 12, 13. *He that is void of wisdom despiseth his neighbour.*—*Types of character in social life*:—Four distinct types of character. I. *THE INSOLENT*. Men destitute of all true respect for their fellows. They are uncivil and rude, sneering, saucy, abusive. II. *THE RESPECTFUL*. He is neither precipitant in the judgment he forms of men, nor hasty in his language. He is the true gentleman of society: cautious, prudent, polite. III. *THE TATTLER*. A tale-bearer is one who will take in your secrets, and hasten to his neighbour to pour them into his greedy ears. He has a witching ear to know your concerns. He is not always malicious in spirit, but he is always dangerous. He is always defending friendships, starting suspicions, and creating animosities. IV. *THE TRUSTWORTHY*. The antithesis to the tale-bearer. He is a dependable friend; he will listen to your secrets as things too sacred for speech. You can trust him with your life, he will never betray you. (*Homilist.*) *Tale-bearers unloading refuse*:—"It was told me in the strictest confidence, but you won't tell!" "No," was the quiet reply; "I prefer not to hear it. What right have you to tell what you virtually promised not to communicate; I am sure I have no right, and I have no desire to know what does not belong to me to know." There are people who use their friends as dumping-grounds, and unload on them any choice bits of scandal they may chance to pick up, as though they were conferring a favour. As long as human nature is what it is, there will be plenty of such unloading to be done; but what noble mind wishes to be put to such ignoble uses, and to have made in any part of his spiritual domain a scavenger heap? The perfect character, like the perfectly kept house, has no dark and dusty corners. It is kept sweet and pure in every part. There is no place where a foul garment or a malodorous rag may be tucked away and hidden. Fire and water and the broom and duster in a modern house keep all things clean. There is no more reason why there should be nesting-places of evil in the soul than why there should be dust upon our furniture. The pure sunlight of God let into dark places cleanses and keeps them clean. The person who in confidence would taint another is not a friend, but an enemy. (*Christian Age.*) *Tale-bearers traders in scandal*:—The word means "a hawk," or "travelling-chapman"; and the tale-bearer is a trader in scandal, an itinerant busybody. A shrewd heathen was wont to say, "Tale-bearers should be hung up by the tongue, and tale-hearers by the ears."

Ver. 14. *Where no counsel is, the people fall.*—*The value of advice*:—Kings and rulers stand in special need of counsel. When a ruler is surrounded by good counsellors he and his people are safe. We can trace this truth in the rise and fall of nations. God's advice is one of our most valuable helps, and the text tells us not to neglect it. Man is apt to go astray. His judgment is sometimes misled; while his affections are corrupted, and his will is ungoverned. I. *WHY DO WE NEED ADVICE?* The first reason is found in the peculiar nature of the evils to which we are exposed. Sin has a strangely deluding influence over those whom it tempts. Here there is scope of need for wise counsels, which may enforce the neglected voice of conscience. Advice is also necessary in consequence of special circumstances in which we are placed. We are involved in difficulties from which others are required to rescue us. "Where no counsel is, the people fall." II. *WHERE ARE WE TO SEEK ADVICE?* We should not ask for it except when we really require it. To be ever at a loss what to do unless we are "advised" is a characteristic of a life that is usually spent to little purpose. The secret of a useful course through

the world lies in a measure of self-reliance. At other times when advice is sought there is a foregone conclusion, and a man only wishes to have his own views confirmed. Out of its proper place advice, instead of being a help, is almost a hindrance to a right decision. It is not safe to go indiscriminately to all sorts of people with a statement of our difficulties, and entreaties for advice in dealing with them. This disposition is the evidence of a weak mind and an irresolute will. There is no real safety in the counsel sought in the confessional. Supreme wisdom comes to us with greatest force when it flows through the channel of hearts bound closely to our own. III. How to TAKE ADVICE. The danger of resenting counsel, when it is unpleasant, is one with which we are all more or less familiar. Those who give advice should always be pure of their warrant to do so. But the more experience a man has the less disposed he will be to give advice unsought. Men are rarely careful enough in their way of giving disagreeable advice. There is a spirit and a manner in some counsels which it is not in human nature to bear. But we must take care lest we be displeased with others whose advice we get, simply because we dislike it. All are not good counsellors who try to lead, and we cannot too carefully test the words of advice which, on every hand, are spoken to us. When we are in doubt as to their value, we must weigh them in the balance of God's sanctuary; and if they speak not according to His law, it is because there is no truth in them. The Great Adviser is always interested in us. Reliance on help from above is verified by the experience of all good men. (*A. MacEwen, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. *A gracious woman retaineth honour.—The honour of woman:—*Here the sexes are put in beautiful apposition: woman is gracious, man is strong. Graciousness dissociated from strength has indeed an influence all its own; strength dissociated from graciousness is mere strength, and is wanting in all those attributes which excite and satisfy the deepest confidences of the world. A woman can work miracles by her graciousness. She knows how to enter the sick chamber noiselessly. She knows how to enter the room without violence, ostentation, or impressiveness, which signifies vanity and display. Woman can speak the gentle word, and look the gracious look, and use the magical touch of friendship and trust, and, in short, can carry her own way without appearing to do so by the very force of tenderness, sympathy, and persuasiveness. Who would raise the foolish question whether grace or strength is the more desirable attribute? Each is desirable in its own way; a combination that is the very perfection of character. Strength and beauty are in the house of the Lord. The great column looks all the better for the beautiful capital which crowns and enriches it. Men should endeavour to cultivate grace, tenderness, all that is charming in spirit, disposition, and action. This cannot be done by mere mimicry; it is to be done by living continually with Christ, studying His spirit, entering into all His purposes, and reproducing, not mechanically, but spiritually, as much as possible of all that was distinctive of His infinite character. The Bible has ever given honour to woman. He is a fool and an unjust man who wishes to keep women in silence, obscurity, and in a state of unimportance; and she is a foolish woman who imagines that she cannot be gracious without being strong, and who wishes to sacrifice her graciousness to some empty reputation for worthless energy. It is not good for the man to be alone, for he is without grace; it is not good for the woman to be alone, for she is without strength; when men and women stand to one another in the right Christian relation they will complete one another, and together constitute the Divine idea of humanity. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. *The merciful man doeth good to his own soul.—The merciful man:—*Our God is a God of mercy. Since He is full of mercy Himself, He is well pleased when He sees us exercise the same towards our fellow-creatures. The wise man here does not speak of tenderness towards others. The merciful man he here represents is a self-interested individual. He "doeth good to his own soul." The merciful is he who is alive to his eternal interests, who is seeking the good of that treasure which is committed to him—"his own soul." How may you promote this most desirable of all objects? 1. He who would do good to his own soul must carefully avoid all manner of sin, whether in thought, word, or deed. The thoughts must be watched. We are to be careful of the words which we utter, so that we may not make our tongues the instruments of evil-speaking, lying, and slandering. And careful also of our conduct and action. 2. Another mark of the object being

kept in view, is the habitual study of the Word of God. The Scriptures testify of Christ, and point Him out as the "way, the truth, and the life." 3. Attention to the means of grace. 4. He endeavours to realise an interest in the merits and atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. 5. The merciful man, who does good to his own soul, does so only by placing his entire dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ. (*D. Slyman, B.A.*) *The generous and the ungenerous*.—I. A GENEROUS DISPOSITION IS A BLESSING TO ITS POSSESSOR. 1. A merciful man doeth good to his intellectual faculties. It is a psychological fact that the intellect can only see clearly, move freely, and progress vigorously as it is surrounded by the atmosphere of disinterested affection. Selfishness blinds, cripples, enervates the intellect. 2. A merciful man doeth good to his moral sentiments. Conscience approves only of the actions that spring from love. II. AN UNGENEROUS DISPOSITION IS A CURSE TO ITS POSSESSOR. Unmercifulness of disposition breeds the fiends of envy, jealousy, malice, remorse, fear, suspicion, pride, that torment the soul. (*Homilist.*) *Mercy to sufferers and to offenders*.—Mercy to sufferers is the disposition to relieve; mercy to offenders is the disposition to forgive. The two are infinitely united in God. Under His government all sufferers are offenders. It is only as offenders that they are sufferers, and when He pardons the offence He cancels the sentence to suffering. And in every good man the two are united. They should, indeed, be regarded as one principle, operating in different departments. The merciful man, whether considered in the one light or in the other—in exercising forgiveness or in relieving distress—"doeth good to his own soul"; he effectually consults his own interests. In the exercise of the generous and kindly affections there is a genuine and exquisite happiness. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 18. **The wicked worketh a deceitful work.**—*The wicked and the just*.—There is here a startling contrast between them, in their work and in their reward. I. **THEIR WORK.** 1. There is intentionally set before us a good specimen of a bad man. He is a man who works, and works hard in his own way. Some evil-doers are idle, profligate, sensual, devilish. Such seldom deceive themselves, and but rarely deceive others. But here is described a man who is very likely to deceive both himself and others. Wicked men are often shrewd men of the world and clever. They are zealous and laborious men, though the objects they aim at may be unworthy and bad. Their mistake is not in the way they work, but in the thing they work for. If all Christians were as eager in their pursuit of truth and charity and all good works as worldly men are in their search after riches and pleasures, what a difference it would make! Whilst the wicked man works in earnest fashion for time, does he attempt any like efforts for eternity? It is a mistake to think the bad man does not care for eternity at all. Multitudes attempt to serve two masters. A man who works with all his strength for worldly success often persuades himself that he will be able to work for eternity too. Does he then labour for the "meat that endureth unto eternal life"? Nay, at this point his wisdom is at fault, the deceitfulness of his work begins to appear. He is no better than a spiritual impostor and spendthrift. He knows nothing of the faith which awakens the generous and noble impulses of humanity, which touches the heart and makes the life holy. He is altogether ignorant of the quickening and sanctifying grace of the Holy Ghost. 2. Not such is the work of the righteous. He "soweth righteousness." The sowing of the seed is the crowning act of the husbandman's preparation for a crop. All his other work goes for nothing unless it be consummated by this work. The wicked is said to work, but the just sows righteousness. The text describes a work of faith. He who "sows righteousness" does it in order that he may hereafter gather in the harvest. What is the seed he sows? (compare Hos. x. 12). To "sow righteousness," to "sow in righteousness," and to "sow to the Spirit," all means the same thing. It is to live righteously, to do righteous actions, to perform acts of devotion and piety to God, and to do works of truth and justice and charity towards our neighbour. It is to learn to do the will of God, looking forward to a future harvest, "having respect unto the recompense of the reward." Righteousness in Scripture is a universal virtue, containing in itself all other virtues. A man must gather his seed before he can sow it. He who is to "sow righteousness" must first obtain a supply of the precious fruit of righteousness. Whence can this supply be fetched? II. **THEIR REWARD.** 1. Working a deceitful work means working so as to deceive others. There is no real truth in a bad man. He is sure to deceive, whenever deceit will serve his ends. He will cast truth to the winds whenever truth calls upon him to suffer, either in his own person, or in

his purse, or in the good opinion of others. Another rendering is, "the wicked winneth deceitful wages." His work will betray him to his ruin, and will in the end utterly disappoint his own hopes. His work will break down just where it ought to stand, and fail altogether when his need is the greatest. 2. Mark well the bright and refreshing contrast. "To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward." The seed which has been sown in hope may lie for a long time beneath the clods, and may seem to be dead as well as buried. But as surely as God's Word is true, it will spring up and grow, and ripen for a harvest of unspeakable joy. The reward of the righteous is a reward of grace and mercy. He that has "sown righteousness" most plentifully will look for his sure reward only from the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ. We live in difficult times, no doubt, but every age has its own trials, and the men of every age are ready to believe that no trials are as bad as theirs. The only safe way is the same in every age. It is to "sow righteousness." (*W. Bonner Hopkins, B.D.*) To him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward.—*The spiritual tillage:—The husbandry and harvest of the righteous:—*This is a counter-plea to that profane principle of the atheists, who say, "It is in vain to serve God." I. WHAT IT IS TO SOW RIGHTEOUSNESS. It is the same as to "sow to the Spirit." The gracious course of consecrating a man's self unto God in the practice of godliness. There is likeness betwixt the practice of godliness and the sowing of seed. 1. In some things which go before sowing—the preparation and fitting of the ground, and the choice of seed to put in the ground. In like manner there must be in the practice of godliness the preparation of the heart and the choice of particulars belonging to a Christian course. 2. In the act of sowing, which may include the time of sowing and the plenty of sowing. In the spiritual business the seed-time for righteousness is in this life; the opportunity must be taken when it comes. And to sow righteousness is to be rich in good works. 3. In the things that follow after sowing. The fields must be hedged, the cattle shut out, the birds driven away, the stones picked out, and the field watched to see how it goes on. In spiritual matters it is vain to have entered into a good course if it be not continued. The signs of the practice of godliness are—(1) The submitting a man's self to have his heart broken up by the power of God's Word; (2) a diligent inquiry into the best way of pleasing God; (3) a pressing forward amid many encumbrances; (4) a striving and caring to be fruitful in good works; (5) a watching over a man's course with a continued diligence. II. WHAT IS THE SURE REWARD? This is either in the life present or in that which is to come. Rewards in this life are both outward and inward: outward so far forth as the wisdom of God shall see it fitting. The inward is peace of conscience, arising out of the comfortable assurance of God's favour. This is a joy working even in afflictions. The reward in the life to come cannot be expressed. Scripture reasoneth concerning the certainty of this reward by a proverbial speech, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." Holiness in the seed, happiness in the harvest. And by the truth of God's promise. There is a double reward—a reward of favour and a reward of debt. The doctrines to be collected are—1. That the practice of godliness is a matter which requireth great industry. 2. That the full reward of religion is not to be looked for immediately on the practice of religion. Sowing and reaping come not at once. 3. That the Lord will surely reward those which faithfully labour in His service. Though there be many a storm after our sowing, the harvest will come, and we shall be comforted. Farmers pay their workmen straight after their labour, before the corn be ripe, but the payments are of far less value than the corn. God bestoweth upon His all that they have sown, and the hire shall far exceed the travail. (*S. Hieron.*) *The two pursuits with their respective ends:—*Denunciations of wrath against the wicked are no less common in Scripture than declarations of mercy to the penitent. The promises of almighty love are often repeated; no less frequent are the proclamations of almighty justice. The doom of the impenitent is no less certain than the rewards of the righteous. Solomon seems to place before us in these words the life of the righteous and the life of the ungodly contrasted with the respective objects which they have in view and the different ends to which they lead. I. THE WICKED WORKETH A DECEITFUL WORK. The object which he pursues seems to promise him great things, but it generally fills him with disappointment and chagrin. The characters of the wicked are various, but in one point they all agree—"they forget God." They practically forget Him. They salve over their own consciences by thoughts of impunity. They have no love to God's name, no inclination to obey His laws; they are by consequence without the

strongest bond of duty in man, which is love. The law of God is hateful to them, because it puts constraint upon their appetites and evil designs. And they are without the bond of fear. As God's judgments are out of sight, so they are out of mind. The pursuit of evil cannot minister to happiness even here below. It is attended with manifold woes, even upon earth. Sin, in most cases, is connected with punishment. "He that pursueth evil pursueth it to his death." It is the death of hope, peace, reputation, and a good conscience. It is often the cause of a premature temporal death. The pursuit of evil is the necessary school and preparation for eternal death.

II. THE DIFFERENT ENDS TO WHICH THE LIFE OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE LIFE OF THE UNGODLY LEAD. What is righteousness? Other terms are godliness, holiness, the new man. What is meant is not the righteousness of forms, but an inward disposition manifested by corresponding conduct, the new heart and the new life. It is the godliness which is opposed to the bodily exercise that profiteth little. Such righteousness tendeth to life. It has a natural and necessary tendency to promote present peace and eternal glory. In Scripture the words life and death are used for happiness and misery. The righteous are necessarily training themselves for eternal happiness, independently of that promise which secures to them "the crown of glory that fadeth not away." There must be a fitness for heaven, a character acquired upon earth which is suitable to the abode of the just. The righteousness of which we speak is conformity of heart and life to Jesus Christ; it is union of soul with Him, a likeness to His example; it has a measure of His holiness and perfection. Righteousness disposes and fits a man for the enjoyment of God, for it cultivates those faculties of the soul which are called into exercise in heaven. Righteousness rests upon the basis of love. The acquiring of this righteousness is the preparation for the enjoyment of God. Already the righteous have communion with the Father of their spirits and with the "spirits of the just made perfect." This being so, the passage for them is easy from this world to eternity. But righteousness also has a tendency to promote present happiness. The righteous live in the favour of God. They have peace of conscience. They fear no evil. They can look on death without alarm. Righteousness has a natural tendency to promote our welfare by conciliating the favour of the good and the respect of all. And the reward laid up in heaven is sure. In conclusion, address two classes: Those who are seeking after righteousness—a word of cheer. Those who are "working a deceitful work"—a word of warning. (H. J. Hastings, M.A.)

The deceitfulness of sin:—Opposites illustrate each other. Of this principle considerable use is made in the sacred Scriptures.

I. OPPOSITE CHARACTERS. The idea of righteousness is equality, as the equilibrium of a pair of scales. Applied to moral or religious natures it means a correspondence between our obligations on the one hand and our performance on the other. So it becomes obedience or conformity to the law. The radical meaning of the word "wicked" is inequality, unfairness. In a moral sense a want of correspondence between duty and performance, or nonconformity to righteous laws. Wickedness is disorder, incongruity, deception, an unsound principle, naturally producing a deceitful work.

II. OPPOSITE PRACTICES. Righteousness renders to all their due. Where wrong sentiments are indulged wrong dispositions and practices naturally follow. Hence result—1. Treachery towards friends. 2. Fraud and falsehood in business. 3. Extortion and oppression. 4. Maladministration; a never-ceasing theme of complaint. In all such cases the work is a "deceitful work"—deceitful in its nature, operation, and results.

III. OPPOSITE RESULTS. 1. God convinces the sinner of his unrighteousness. 2. Enlightens, transforms, and renews the soul. The renewed begins to sow righteousness. To him there is a sure reward. Pause and inquire whether such a change has been effected in you. Pray for convincing and converting grace. Persevere through evil and through good report. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

The reward of sowing righteousness:—In the Bible a righteous person is one who loves and serves God, i.e., one who is a true Christian. When people become true Christians themselves they want to do all they can to try to make other people Christians. All the good things that such people do in this way the Bible calls righteousness. Sowing, in the text, means doing. Righteousness, in the text, means kind acts, good works of any kind, that Christian people do out of love to Jesus and from a desire to make others love Him. And thus we find out that "sowing righteousness" means doing good. Righteousness is the best seed in the world to sow. 1. Because of the size of the field in which this sowing may be carried on. 2. Because of the number and kind of sowers. Farmers are only one class of men. All classes of persons may be sowers of righteousness.

3. Because of the certainty of the reward. Farmers hope for harvest, but cannot be quite sure. The reward of sowing righteousness is made up of pleasure and profit. Sometimes the profit is found in this life. But the best part of the reward is in heaven. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *The evil and the good*:—Men separate morally into two great divisions. See them—I. AS THEY APPEAR AT WORK. 1. Evil works deceitfully. It deceives the individual possessor; it makes his very life a fiction. It deceives others. It fabricates and propagates falsehood. 2. The good works righteously. Being righteous in heart, he is charged with righteous principles, which he sows as seed in the social circle to which he belongs. II. AS THEY APPEAR IN RETRIBUTION. All works, the bad as well as the good, bring results to the worker. These results are the retribution; they are God's return for labour. 1. The righteous reap life. Life of the highest kind—spiritual. Life of the highest degree—immortal blessedness. 2. The wicked reap death—the death of all usefulness, nobility, and enjoyment. III. AS THEY APPEAR BEFORE GOD. 1. God observes moral distinctions. 2. God is affected by moral distinctions. What He sees He feels. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. As righteousness tendeth to life : so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death.—*The reward of righteousness*:—Life and death are objects of universal interest. Life here is life spiritual and eternal. Death is viewed as involving separation and exclusion from God. I. RIGHTEOUSNESS PROVES THE SPIRITUAL LIFE TO BE BEGUN IN OUR SOULS; EVIL SHOWS THAT OUR SOULS ARE STILL DEAD IN SIN. Naturally we are all dead in sin. There is a life which God's life-giving Spirit begins in us. One of the most marked indications of its existence is righteousness developing itself in the whole character and conduct. II. RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CONNECTED WITH THE SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT WHICH MAINTAINS LIFE; EVIL WITH THE NEGLECT OF SUCH NOURISHMENT, WHICH OCCASIONS DEATH. Man's spiritual nature must receive spiritual sustenance. The soul that is quickened to righteousness hungers and thirsts after righteousness, and God bestows upon it what it seeks, so as to nourish it and strengthen it. III. RIGHTEOUSNESS LEADS TO COURSES OF ACTION WHICH PROLONG LIFE; EVIL, FROM ITS VERY NATURE, CONDUCTS TO DEATH. God's ways tend not only to the preservation and prolongation of life in this world, but to the full enjoyment of life for evermore. IV. RIGHTEOUSNESS ASSOCIATES US WITH THOSE WHO ARE ALIVE TO GOD, THUS HELPING TO MAINTAIN LIFE IN THE SOUL; EVIL UNITES US TO THOSE WHO ARE SPIRITUALLY DEAD, AND BRINGS US INTO THE SAME STATE WITH THEM. To be the living among the dead is no easy thing. If voluntarily we associate with the dead, imbibing their spirit, and following their ways, we must be conformed in likeness to them. V. RIGHTEOUSNESS ENSURES THE DIVINE PROTECTION, SO THAT LIFE IS GUARDED AND DEFENDED; EVIL INCURS GOD'S WRATH, WHICH IS DEATH. Life is a brittle thing. The great God who gives it is ready, however, to ward off all the dangers which may menace it. His favour is life; His frown is death. VI. RIGHTEOUSNESS CONDUCTS TO LIFE EVERLASTING IN HEAVEN; EVIL TO ETERNAL DEATH IN HELL. The world of glory shall be peopled by the righteous. The evil and unbelieving shall inhabit the world of woe. (*Anon.*) *Pursuing evil*:—The "sure reward" in the preceding verse is "life" in this; and as that reward is sure in the one case, the "deceitfulness of the wicked's work" lies in its effecting "death" as its result instead of "life." He who "pursueth evil" may overtake it, and may boast himself in the success of his pursuit. But the very evil that he overtakes shall slay him. It is as if a man were to pursue a serpent, captivated by the beauty of its appearance, in its shifting and glistening hues, but ignorant of the venom of its sting, or its fang, and in the act of laying hold of it, were to receive the deadly wound. Death treads on the very heels of the man who "pursueth evil"; and when he overtakes the evil, death overtakes him. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *The natural history of evil*:—Every sinner plans and acts against his own personal interest; and fond as he is of life, he is a self-destroyer. He is allured by false appearances, enveloped in sense and sensual delights, and follows a path that ends in destruction. I. THE COMMENCEMENT OF MORAL EVIL IN THE HUMAN SOUL. He is born in a state of impurity. Evil is interwoven in the very texture of his being. It commenced with the first family of the human race, and the evil spirit of unrighteousness has been transmitted from father to son. When a man is not properly acquainted with the corruption of his nature, he mistakes a want of opportunity to sin for moral purity of heart, and the absence of temptation for a truly virtuous mind. Evil in actual operation in human life—1. Springs up in thoughts. 2. Finds expression in overt acts.

II. THE PROGRESS OF MORAL EVIL. "He that pursueth evil." There is not the root only, but also the tree and the growth. A man seldom becomes a sudden profligate. By a continuance in evil the feelings become less affected with its enormity, the conscience is less tender and scrupulous, the base inclinations and passions of the heart gather strength, and temptation finds an easy dupe to every impious proposal. Sin has not a resting-place. It carries within itself the power of perpetual motion. Sin hardens the heart. **III. THE COMPLETION OF MORAL EVIL.** It has its seed-time, its growth, and its harvest. 1. The completion of sin is the death of reputation. 2. The death of enjoyment. 3. The death of the body. 4. The death of the soul. (Thomas Wood.)

Ver. 20. Such as are upright in their way are His delight.—*The upright, God's delight*:—I. WHO ARE THE UPRIGHT? Those whom God makes upright, the workmanship of His own Spirit, His new creation. This does not deny that there is in a sense an uprightness in the natural man. As long as man is a responsible being he is answerable to God for the use of the means given him, and it is a certain truth that there is not a natural man in the world who acts up to the light that he has. Great numbers claim the character of being upright and sincere. So the apostle Paul thought of himself when in his unconverted state. Natural sincerity never comes to the testing of God's holy light. It can deal with man, but there is never that in natural sincerity which comes before God. For the upright see the publican smiting on his breast; the prodigal returning home; the woman a sinner dropping tears of penitence on Jesus's feet; Matthew, Zaccheus, Nicodemus. The weakest, the feeblest believer, is upright. He often, indeed, thinks himself otherwise. He will even regard himself as a self-deceiver. The upright man mourns over inbred corruptions. Sometimes he has seasons of doubt. He is brought into circumstances of trial. Amidst all, in the grace of the Holy Spirit, he holds fast his integrity. **II. THE UPRIGHT ARE GOD'S DELIGHT.** It is not their way, but themselves, that are His delight. He loved them before all worlds; He loved them before they loved Him in eternity. But the characters of the upright are His delight. He delights in the fruits of His own Son's mediation, in the workmanship of His own Spirit, and in the reflection of His own image. But especially He delights in their being upright. He looks to the humiliation of the upright, their broken hearts, their falling tears. So precious is this uprightness before God, that it seems as if He overlooked all faults where it is. What a word of encouragement this ought to be to those who are honestly seeking Him! If you are indeed upright God knows it, and "your inheritance shall be for ever." (J. Harrington Evans.)

Ver. 21. Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished. (Taken with Luke xxiii. 51.)—*The laws of responsibility in combinations and partnerships*:—We are surrounded by numberless combinations devised by men for all manner of purposes—religious, political, judicial, social, commercial, scientific, industrial, artistic, educational, &c. Men widely abandon endeavours after striking individuality in thought or conduct, and throw themselves blindfold into the stream of fashion which carries the multitude away. Men seek to recover their lost sense of power by combination with others in doctrine, in capital, indeed in all departments. The will of each individual becomes, as it were, a single minute cog in a mighty wheel-work of engineering, which carries everything before it. All this is not favourable to the sense of responsibility for conduct here or hereafter. There is a special delusion which attends the combinations in which men seek to recover the sense of power, and to unite their forces in order to accomplish their ends. This delusion consists in mistaking joint responsibility for divided responsibility. The persuasion is extended widely that union is not only strength in administration and enterprise, but that it distributes the oppressive burden of responsibility in equal or nearly equal and insignificant shares between all the persons who are joined together in any undertaking; so that although the practical result of their united action may be morally indefensible, or even utterly wicked and injurious, no single person can be justly blamed, or rendered accountable for the whole criminality of the result—since the wickedness has been effected by an organisation or administration consisting of numbers of agents who have assisted or consented in the work. A characteristic proverb has descended to us from the last century to this effect: "A cathedral chapter would divide even a murder between them"—a proverb unfairly singling out one particular kind of Christian combination for censure,

yet embodying two truths applicable to every association, civil and religious. 1. That even well-disposed men will sometimes agree to do in company what they would not dare to do as individuals. 2. That no man's personal accountableness to God can ever be swallowed up and lost in an impersonal organisation. The relation of the individual to the moral government of God is primary, dominant, and inalienable; it cannot be diminished by the concurrence of others. Before God the combination of men in counsel and action results always not in divided responsibility but in joint responsibility. Each member is responsible for the whole result of what he consents to, or carries into action. There can be no divided liability for a conjoint iniquity. If this were not so, it would require men only to join hand in hand to go unpunished. But how should God judge the world unless in all such cases the responsibility is joint, not distributive? This is also the principle of human legislation and administration. It is not, therefore, good to undertake, as if merely nominal, any real responsibilities. This truth, that a man is responsible for whatever he consents to, ought—1. To be proclaimed in relation to ecclesiastical organisations and missionary societies. 2. The principle may be seen in the working of political party. Educated men are guilty, in a free country, of all the national iniquity against which they do not protest with determination. 3. The principle of personal liability needs application to commercial affairs and civil life. The Almighty God stands behind every creditor and every customer, in readiness to assert and enforce every just claim to the uttermost. The Infinite Defender of Right is behind every person who is wronged. The highest Law Court is omnipresent and sleepless. We cannot put an end to the great battle between selfish interests, but we can do much by public spirit and sound legislation to alleviate its woes. On the whole I must express my conviction, however, that the commercial world will bear an honourable comparison with the political and ecclesiastical, when tried by this principle of the responsibility of each member in every combination. (*Edward White.*)

Combination.—Men, like sheep, are gregarious. The combination is—I. NATURAL. The wicked, in the text, are supposed to be in danger, and nothing is more natural than for men to crowd together in common danger. Fear as well as love brings men together; the one drives, the other draws. II. USELESS. No combination of men, however great in number, vast in wisdom, mighty in strength, affluent in resources, can prevent punishment from befalling the wicked. It must come. 1. The moral constitution of the soul. 2. The justice of the universe. 3. The almightiness of God, render all human efforts to avoid it futile. (*Homilist.*)

Opposing God useless.—The uselessness of opposing God must be manifest from every point of view. God is omniscient, and knows all things; is almighty, and can do all things; is omnipresent, and is everywhere: so that no device or counsel or plot can succeed against Him. The image of the text is that of conspiracy, wicked men combining, saying to one another in effect, "If each of us cannot succeed singly, we may by combination succeed as a unity." The possibility of such a conspiracy was foreseen, and the issue of it is foretold in these plain terms. Let men add money to money, genius to genius, influence to influence, counsel to counsel, still it is but like the addition of so many ciphers—the number being very great but the value being absolutely nothing. What one man cannot do in this direction a thousand men are unable to do. Fool, then, is he who supposes that because he has followed a multitude to do evil, therefore no harm will come to him. Every man in the multitude will be judged as if he were alone responsible for the whole mischief. Hands that are joined together in wickedness may be dis severed on any occasion and for the flimsiest reasons. It is folly for any wicked man to trust in a man as wicked as himself, for the very fact that wickedness renders security impossible, and turns all manner of association into a mere matter of temporary convenience, which may be varied or destroyed according to a thousand contingencies. All evil partnerships in business are doomed to failure. All irregular alliances in the household must come to confusion and disappointment, and may end fatally. The same law holds good in the State, and indeed in every department of life. There can be no security but in righteousness, in high wisdom, in unselfish enthusiasm; where these abound the security is as complete as it is possible for man to make it. Men cannot be joined wisely and permanently together unless they are first joined to the living God. Men can only be joined to the living God through the living Christ; He is the vine, men are the branches, and unless the branch abides in the vine it cannot bear fruit, but is doomed to be burned. True union, therefore, must be religious or spiritual before it can be human and social. Neglect of this great law has ended in

inexpressible disappointment and mortification on the part of statesmen, reformers, and propagandists of every kind. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) But the seed of the righteous shall be delivered.—*The sanctions of obedience*.—The text is a twofold proposition—that combinations against God and godliness only incur failure and penalty; and that the triumph of righteousness is equally sure. There are among men's habits three general kinds of "wickedness," or disobedience to God's laws, entailing upon them three several orders and degrees of retribution or punishment: violations of the laws which govern the spiritual or moral man, the animal man, and the social man. 1. If the mind-laws, which include the intellectual and moral aspects of man, be disobeyed, that is if the process of education be not contemporaneous with the progress of years, the mental faculty languishes in the stagnation of its undeveloped powers, the mental man grows and abides an ignoramus, a stereotyped boor; and if the means of grace be in like manner neglected, the spiritual man rises not into the dignity which the love of God designed for him. 2. If the body-laws, or the principles which regulate the health, be disregarded by habits of excess or even ordinary indulgence or neglect of exercise, the penalty is a diseased body, and personal infirmity. 3. If the estate laws be disregarded, which make industry essential to getting, and frugality essential to saving what is got, and forethought essential in the way of insurance upon life or property, the punishment meets the man in his estate, in his condition of life, that is, in the form in which he has sinned. When we pray for a sound and enlightened mind, do we turn to the Word "whose entrance giveth light"? Do we seek to inform our minds, correct our judgments, and enrich our memories? When we pray for health and strength to labour and enjoy, do we avoid those varieties, artifices, and excesses in food and drink, and those sluggish habits of inactivity and sloth, which make health physically impossible? When we pray for prosperity in our worldly affairs, do we still, on conscientious principles, "labour, working with our hands the thing that is meet"? Do we glorify God in our attention to our business? Where can there be a more cogent, impressive, animating motive than the sterling fact, "Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your bodies and spirits, which are His"? Man can no more do without God, or act independently of God and His laws, than the rays of light can dispense with the sun. All the errors of individual character, all the failures in educational theories, all the mistakes of experimental legislation, originate in the fundamental fatal effect of reckoning without God, setting aside the great elemental fact that He is at the root, progress, and issue of all things, and that to put Him out of our calculations, to supersede His constitution, is to start upon false premises, to provoke and compel a failure, to reason and range in a vicious circle, for ever retracing its impracticable, unprogressive steps. "The wicked shall not go unpunished." "The seed of the righteous shall be delivered." (*Joseph B. Owen, M.A.*)

Ver. 22. As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion.—*A good thing in a bad place*.—The Jews regarded the pig as an unclean animal. The heathen around worshipped the pig, and they ate it afterwards as an act of worship. The Egyptians, when they wished to draw a picture of a very foolish person, always represented him as a pig. How unlovely is the idea of a jewel that might have been worn by a queen being placed in the nose of a pig! But there are some things that we see every day which are quite as bad. For instance—1. A pretty face and a very ugly soul. It is nice to be beautiful, but it is far better to be good. When you feel tempted to be proud because you are good-looking, ask yourself, "Is my soul good-looking and beautiful to God?" 2. A good head and a bad heart. King John, one of England's worst kings, was a very clever man. It is not enough to be learned, or to have great talents; we want to be holy, and then shall we be able to use our abilities well. 3. Wise words and foolish deeds. It was said of a certain king, that "he never said a foolish thing and never did a wise one." A jewel treated as described in this text would be a jewel misapplied. It was never intended for such a use. And God did not intend that we should ever waste our minds and our time in the service of sin. The Jews had a saying that the nose of a pig is walking dirt. If a jewel were placed in it, it would be spoiled. Sin mars a beautiful face; it will even make a clever man foolish; it will ruin us if it be not taken away from us. (*J. J. Ellis.*) *Bedizened wickedness*.—A fair woman is one of personal attractions. Discretion means virtue or moral worth. A woman of external attractions who is devoid of mind

excellences is a most unsightly object. I. HERE IS A VERY INCONGRUOUS CONJUNCTION IN ONE PERSON. Physical beauty and moral deformity united. Do not despise natural, or personal, or artistic beauty. II. HERE IS A VERY REVOLTING CONJUNCTION IN ONE PERSON. Incongruity is not always disgusting, it is sometimes ridiculous. But this incongruity is disgusting when it is seen aright with healthy moral sentiments. We do not always see how revolting it is, because our eye rests upon the personal attraction, and peers not into the moral heart. We are taken up more with the "jewel" than with the "swine." III. HERE IS A VERY COMMON CONJUNCTION IN ONE PERSON. 1. Wickedness is prompted by personal attraction. 2. Wickedness is fond of personal attractions. Vulgarity always likes finery, and sin is always fond of making a grand appearance. Do not, in forming your fellowships, be carried away with one side of life. Do not follow the swine for the sake of the jewel. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.—*The tendency of liberality to riches, and of covetousness to poverty*:—The words of this text carry an air of improbable and surprising paradoxes to the covetous and worldly-minded, who naturally imagine that scattering tends to poverty, and withholding to increase. But if we take them to be allusive to the management of a husbandman in sowing his seed, the sense will stand as easy as the thought will appear to be beautiful and just (compare 2 Cor. ix. 6). I. THE DESCRIPTION OF PERSONS OF VERY OPPOSITE CHARACTERS. "Scatter" is the same word as "disperse" (*Psa. cxii. 9*). He that scatters is the liberal soul; the man who, with a free and generous spirit, labours to spread the most useful and extensive influence, by all manner of means; the man who is ready to distribute of his temporal substance for promoting religious and civil liberties and interests, for doing good to the souls and bodies of men, and, particularly, for relieving the necessitous and the distressed. We should manage our religious and charitable distributions, not with contrivance how to shift off our obligations and opportunities for them, but with devising how in the best manner to improve them; not with a grudging, but with a free and cheerful heart. On the contrary, he that withholds, keeps back, or spares, more than is meet or right, is the covetous man, whose narrow, selfish spirit will not suffer him cheerfully to pay his personal or his public debts, much less to practise beneficence at an expense that cannot be demanded by human laws. No arguments derived from humanity or Christianity can work his heart up to bear his proper proportion in generous and beneficent acts. II. WHAT IS AFFIRMED OF THESE PERSONS RESPECTIVELY. We might consider this increase and want with respect to our best interests, that relate to the enrichment of the soul in goodness. Distributing enlarges the heart, and makes it open, free, and generous, with growing propensions to every good work. The man who withholds is poor-spirited; he has a contracted soul; he is destitute of those amiable graces by which our God and Saviour are most conspicuously imitated and glorified. We may also consider this increase and want with respect to our worldly substance. That is not lessened but improved by distributions on all proper occasions. Withholdings, more than is meet, ever tend to poverty and want. God's blessing on the generous comes either as a visible increase of their outward estates, or as a secret increase of the inward contentment of their own minds. Those who are of a covetous temper, do not enjoy what they possess. According to a just estimation of things, they are no richer by all their silver and gold than if it still lay in the ore of the Indian mines. III. ACCOUNT FOR THE TRUTH OF BOTH THESE PROPOSITIONS. Every virtuous, spiritual, and holy disposition of the soul increases by frequent and proper exercise; and loses its force and vigour, and aptness for action, by disuse and neglect. This is common to all principles and habits of the moral or religious and supernatural kind. 1. The blessing of God is upon them that scatter, and His blast is upon them that withhold more than is meet. 2. The friendship of men is toward them that scatter, and their disaffection toward those who withhold more than is meet. (*J. Guise, D.D.*) *Wise philanthropy*:—To distribute portions of our wealth in schemes and acts of wise philanthropy is like casting into the ground as seed a proportion of the last year's harvest. It goes out of your sight for the moment, but it will spring in secret, and come back to your own bosom, like manna from heaven. An unwise man may indeed scatter his corn on barren rocks, or on equally barren sands, and though he sow bountifully he will reap sparingly there. So, in the moral region, the increase is not absolutely in proportion to the profusion of the scattering. When a man lays out large sums on unworthy objects, to feed his own vanity or

gratify his own whim, he neither does nor gets good. The outlay is in its own nature and necessarily profitable. In educating the young, in reclaiming the vicious, in supporting the aged poor, in healing the sick, and in making known the gospel to all, we have ample fields to cultivate, and the prospect of large returns to cheer us in the toil. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The profit of liberality*.—The Bible gives us plain view of the character and mind of God; and that view sets Him before us as a Being interested in promoting the happiness of His creatures. It presents Him as establishing, by His wise decree, that order of things which places men in different classes and circumstances of life; it shows us that high and low station, wealth and poverty, affluence and dependence, are the result of Divine arrangement, and so far it discourages pride and envy, and teaches thankfulness, contentment, and resignation, in the several conditions of human life. God, in His care of all His creatures, has made it binding on the rich, by an express enactment, that they should see to, and provide for, the wants of the poor. There is nothing more frequently, nor more strongly spoken of in the Word of God, than that assistance, arising out of the fact of their brotherhood, which man should render man. The text sets before us two different modes of dealing with our property, in reference to our fellow-creatures. I. THE LIBERAL MAN, AND WHAT HE GETS FROM HIS LIBERALITY. The man here is living in the midst of dependent fellow-creatures, and uses his property in relieving them. Here seems to be the idea of a husbandman throwing his seed in every direction where it may be profitable. The liberal man looks abroad, and where his money is wanted, and where it is likely to do good, there he gives it with the greatest cheerfulness of mind. This is what ought to be. We are not required to give away when we have not in reality the power to do so; but when we possess the power the duty is incumbent. We must “scatter” for the blessing of others. A notion prevails that if we give liberally to others, we hurt ourselves. We are, indeed, told to “do good, hoping for nothing again,” yet we may urge as an encouragement that, in sowing the seeds of kindness, we are sure to reap a personal benefit. The men who have been most liberal have, in a general way, prospered most in their worldly undertakings; and certainly they have been rewarded with growth in grace, and a large measure of peace, confidence, and joy in their own souls. II. THE MEAN MAN, AND THE RESULT WHICH FOLLOWS HIS MEANNESS. To withhold is not always wrong. It may be a right thing, a positive duty. But some men are wretchedly mean; they have not a spark of kind sympathy or of generous sensibility in their souls. They are over-full of their own things. These the text speaks about. There is a measure in the amount of almsgiving which is to be determined by a person's circumstances. To whom much is given, from the same will much be required. If you give God less than God requires of you, then instead of a blessing there will rest on you a curse. God has often taken away from a man the riches which he would not use rightly when he had them. Poverty of pocket is not the worst kind of poverty. It is poverty of soul that is so deplorable. (*William Curling, M.A.*) *The use and abuse of poverty*.—Nothing is wanting to the right direction of human conduct, but a clear perception of man's own interest, and a correct estimate of man's own responsibility. In the text a contrast of two characters and of two consequences. I. TWO OPPOSING CHARACTERS. One is said to “scatter.” Of the blessed man it is said, “He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor” (Psa. cxii. 9). The apostle says, “He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly, and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.” Faithfulness implies two things: first, a clear perception, a just apprehension of the purposes for which we are put in trust; and secondly, a conscientious employment of those means by which the purposes are to be accomplished, according to the dictates and directions of the supreme Lord of all. Neither indiscriminate almsgiving nor improvident expenditure derive any countenance from the rule of Christian practice, as finally and unalterably settled in the epistles to the infant Churches. The man who “scattereth” is the man who gives, whether to the service of his God, or to the succour of his fellow-men, on principle; the man whose charities, as they are called (though the term religious obligations would be far more applicable), bear some definite and assignable proportion, not only to his present expenses and indulgences, but to the provision for the family; the man, who devotes to purposes of philanthropy and piety such a proportion of his worldly increase, as his own conscience, enlightened and directed by God's Word, accounts an offering expressive of his gratitude to the Giver of every good and perfect gift. The contrary character to this is he who “withholdeth more than is meet”; he who is actuated, alike in what he saves, and in what he spends, by

considerations purely selfish; who professes, indeed, that he accumulates upon principle, but whose principle will not endure the application of the standard of the Word of God, his object being to found or to aggrandise a family, while in prosecuting this object he overlooks or undervalues the salvation of the soul. Many are the subtleties and evasions by which men endeavour to justify, or at least to palliate, their own conduct in "withholding more than is meet," e.g., difficulty of detecting imposture; perversion of benevolent funds; and the excuse that whatever is spent is a contingent evil, while whatever is hoarded is a certain good. II. Two OPPOSING CONSEQUENCES. True wisdom involves the consideration of our latter end. If the habits and actions of the "life that now is" can exert any influence upon the destinies of "that which is to come," the counsel given by our Lord would be the dictate of policy, as well as the command of authority: "Walk while ye have the light." Temporal blessings do usually wait upon the discreet and conscientious dispensation of God's bounty. He that scattereth increaseth even in this world's goods. But Christian benevolence for Christ's sake must not be taken for the whole of the system of Christian practice, of which it only constitutes a part. Towards poverty of soul tendeth that mistaken and short-sighted policy, which men are wont to term prudence and forecast. But to have made no use of God's property for God's purposes will be a ground of judgment and condemnation, as much as to have abused it for our own. (*Thomas Dale, M.A.*)

How to gain by spending:—The text is generally true, if we confine its application to money. In a moral and spiritual sense the proverb is universally true. The man who gives bountifully loses nothing by his gifts, but gains much. The first thing that strikes us when we consider the nature of property is its exclusive character. Every pound we call our own, and every shilling we reserve for our own use, is so much less for other people. The higher wealth of the intellect is not so exclusive in its nature. You do not lose your gift as an artist if you teach a class to paint. Only in a limited degree do you increase your mental endowments by imparting them to others. But we actually increase our spiritual riches by spending them. The more of the bread of life you give away, the more you will find in your store. Spiritual wealth is like money wealth in this respect, that we must invest it if it is to increase. Hoarding money never adds to the heap. Two practical lessons. 1. We see the absolute necessity of some form of spiritual activity to the increase of the Christian life. 2. The course of thought we have been pursuing suggests to us the spiritual nature of the Divine rewards. We need, badly need, a revision of the vocabulary of the Divine rewards. Too often those rewards are spoken of in terms which degrade rather than honour the high service of God. The reward and the service are one. The rewards of Christ are not less service, but more service and higher toil. (*G. S. Barrett, D.D.*) *Discreet liberality*:—Of all the rich men that have come to poverty, I never heard of any that was ruined by a discreet liberality. (*G. Lawson.*) *Generosity*:—

I. **GENEROSITY EXEMPLIFIED.** 1. In nature. Clouds give rain, sun gives light, earth gives fruit. "The heart does not receive the blood to store it up, but while it pumps it in at one valve, it sends it forth at another." 2. In the example of Christ (Gal. i. 4). 3. In the early Church (Acts ii. 44, 45). 4. In modern times. Peabody, Morley, &c. II. **GENEROSITY EXTOLLED.** 1. It is unstinted (Isa. xxxii. 8). 2. It is profitable. One who has had experience in giving systematically, says, "It pays as an investment, and is a fortune in business." Mr. Haig Miller tells of a gentleman who, on starting in life, said, "I determined that for every £10,000 I made £1,000 should be given back to God and works of charity, and I have had ten times to fulfil my vow." If temporal gain is the motive which inspires giving, the act will be spoiled by the motive; but giving from right motives is often honoured by a present and a bountiful return. The converse of this is true. Withholding "tendeth to poverty." If not poverty of purse, as is often the case, there will be poverty of soul. 3. It is hearty. "God never sent us into this world to do anything into which we cannot put our hearts." 4. It is healthy. "If a man is growing large in wealth, nothing but constant and generous giving can save him from growing small in soul." 5. It is refreshing. 6. It wins the heart. Edward Payson said, when dying, "I long to give a full cup of happiness to every human being." The benedictions of his people were a chief part of his rich reward (compare Job xxix. 13). 7. It is painstaking. The true friend of the needy does not wait till misery presses its claim at his door; he goes and looks first (compare Luke xix. 10). (*H. Thorne.*) *Profitable scattering*:—Every year George Moore wrote these words in his pocket-book. They became engraved on his soul, and to

an extent formed his creed: "What I spent I had: What I saved I lost: What I gave I have." *Benevolent activity*:—One would say that to scatter anything is to part with it without advantage; and that to withhold, to keep back, is undoubtedly to save and to retain. The text teaches that this may be quite a mistake on our part. There is reckless scattering and there is wise withholding. The text is not to be taken in its literalness; it is to be examined in its spirit. Happily we have no need to go further in search of illustration of the truth of the text; we find it on every farm, in every business, in every school. The text calls to benevolent activity founded on religious faith. The doctrine enlarges and glorifies life by calling into life elements and considerations which lie beyond the present and the visible. The very exercise of scattering carries blessing with it, breaks up the mastery of selfishness, and enlarges the circle of kindly interests. Beneficence is its own compensation. Charity empties the heart of one gift that it may make room for a larger. But if any man think to give God something with the idea of having it back again, that man will be disappointed and humiliated, and justly so. The other side of this text is as emphatic and as often illustrated in practical life as the first. Selfishness is suicidal; selfishness lives in gloom; selfishness injects poison into every stream of life. Selfishness is most intensely selfish when it assumes the name of prudence. When selfishness chatters proverbs, it has reached the depth beyond which there is no death. God can turn the wicked man's very success into failure, and out of selfish ambition He can bring the scorpion whose sting is death. Though this text is found in the Old Testament, the principle is distinctly held by Jesus Christ. It is a moral principle, universal and unchangeable in its force and application. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Liberality*:—This is one eminent branch of the character of the righteous, but because there are many objections in the heart of man against the practice of it, urgent motives are here addressed to us. The instructions delivered in this and the four following verses, will, if they are but believed, be a sufficient answer to every objection. There is that scattereth his substance by profusion and luxury. That man diminishes his substance till it comes to nothing. But he that disperses by giving to the poor, by liberal distributions for the support of the commonwealth in times of danger, or for the service of religion, shall increase his substance. He is like the husbandman, who sows with good-will and unsparing hand that precious seed which is to produce a joyful harvest. It is God who gives all that we enjoy, and by His secret blessing, or by remarkable interpositions of providence, the liberal man is often made to abound in riches, and enabled more and more abundantly to serve his fellow-men. Abraham sat at his tent door to watch for passengers, and those who came he urged to partake of his bounty, with more earnestness than other men beg an alms. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 25. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself.—*The waterer watered*:—The general principle is, that in living for the good of others, we shall be profited also ourselves. This teaching is sustained by the analogy of nature, for in nature there is a law that no one thing can be independent of the rest of creation, but there is a mutual action and reaction of all upon all. God has so constituted this universe, that selfishness is the greatest possible offence against His law, and living for others, and ministering to others, is the strictest obedience to His will. Our surest road to our own happiness is to seek the good of our fellows. We store up in God's own bank what we generously expend on the behalf of our race. To get we must give; to accumulate we must scatter; to make ourselves happy, to get good and become spiritually vigorous, we must do good, and seek the spiritual good of others. **I. APPLY THIS PRINCIPLE, IN ITS NARROW SENSE, AS BELONGING TO OURSELVES PERSONALLY.** There are some works in which we cannot all engage. Peculiar men have special work; but watering is work for persons of all grades and all sorts. 1. All God's plants, more or less, want watering. 2. The Lord's people usually get this watering through instrumentality. The Holy Spirit waters us by the admonitions of parents, by the kind suggestions of friends, by the teaching of His ministers, by the example of all His saints. 3. Some plants need special watering, and should be the objects of unusual care—partly because of temperament or of ignorance, and partly because of circumstances, maybe of trial, maybe of soul-withering. 4. All believers have some power to water others. In so watering others we shall be watered ourselves. This is the main point. (1) You will waken up your own powers. (2) You will yourself gain instruction. (3) You will get comfort in your

work. (4) Watering others will make you humble. (5) You will win many prayers. (6) You will even get honour to yourselves, that will stimulate you to new exertions. (7) While watering others you will be manifesting and showing your love to Christ, and that will make you more like Him. II. THE PRINCIPLE, IN A WIDER SENSE, AS IT MAY REFER TO US AS A CHURCH. We, as a Church, have enjoyed singular prosperity; but we have endeavoured to water others. We have undertaken a good many enterprises for Christ, and we hope to undertake a great many more. We must keep our watering work up. III. THE PRINCIPLE, IN THE WIDEST SENSE, AS IT MAY BE REFERRED TO THE ENTIRE BODY OF CHRIST. Our missionary operations are an infinite blessing to the Churches at home. Relinquishing them, giving them up, staying them, would bring such a curse that we had need to go down on our knees and pray, "God send the missionary work back again." (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Scriptural liberality illustrated and enforced:—All the appearances of virtue and piety do not partake of their real nature. See the case of the Pharisees. None of our good works can be viewed with approbation by God unless they spring from a right principle, are guided by a right rule, and are directed to a right end. God looks at the motive in which they originate. I. THE CHARACTER OF TRUE RELIGIOUS OR CHRISTIAN LIBERALITY. 1. Its principle. The spirit which is in man must be the seat of this virtue, or the liberal hand, so far as it respects God, is of no worth. There is much beneficence apart from religion. But it is the grateful heart God requires. 2. Its objects. First our kindred according to the flesh. Then the poor and distressed in society. 3. The modes in which this liberality should express itself. It should be honest in its administration. It should be proportionate in degree. It should be affectionate in its communication. It should be expansive in its embrace. It should be habitual in its exercise. II. THE RECOMPENSE TO ENCOURAGE US TO ITS EXERCISE AND DISPLAY. 1. As respects the life that now is. Inward pleasure, pleasure in looking at the good effected; enlarged powers of usefulness. 2. As respects the life to come. Apply to those who give nothing to the cause of the poor. To those who give little. To those who are in the habit of giving much. (John Clayton, jun.)

The blessedness of blessing:—It must be admitted that the natural tendency of things in this present fallen world is by no means such as to secure a prosperous result to rectitude of conduct, and failure to that of a contrary character. We often witness the inversion of this order. It is necessary to consider the character of the dispensation under which the book was written. The Jews were ostensibly, as well as really, under the immediate government of God; a government sanctioned by temporal rewards and punishments. This gave to the government of God over them what we may term a visible character. There was an ostensible Moral Governor. The Jew, apart from all consideration of a future state, was entitled to look, even in this life, for a providential sanction to his conduct, when his ways were such as pleased the Lord. In God's dealings with that people He affords an emblem, a visible emblem, of His dealings with others. The great distinction between the Jewish and the Christian dispensations is, that the one was addressed to sense, the other to faith; the one deals with visible things, the other with spiritual. It is but consistent with this distinction, that while God's providential government over His people is not less real under the Christian dispensation, it should be less manifest. Those things which would be perplexing to us if we attempt to judge the ways of God by sense, become reconcilable with His character and with His promises when regarded in the judgment of faith. Objection might be raised on the ground that the assertion of the text is contradicted by absolute matter of fact. The words, translated out of their figurative language, obviously assert, that he who liberally dispenses to others of those bounties, whether in grace or in providence, which God has conferred upon him, shall be himself more abundantly enriched. To the eye of sense this assertion is far from being universally verified among us as a matter of fact. In a worldly point of view it is not always the most virtuous who are the most prosperous, nor the most liberal who are the most successful. But faith will see every promise to us fulfilled in a higher and better sense. The highest exemplification of this passage is found in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He spent His life in blessing; therefore it was He was so greatly blessed. The recompense of the reward is a motive sanctioned by the highest example, that of Christ Himself. Some think it savours too much of legality, to hold out a future recompense as a stimulus to the active employment of all our talents in the service of God. Yet surely this is to confound things that are perfectly distinct in themselves. It is not inconsistent with the doctrines of grace to propose a proportionable increase of

future joy as a motive to present sacrifice, and to hold it up before Christians as a matter of certainty, that every sacrifice which they make for the Lord's sake shall be repaid from the hand of the Lord. The liberal distribution of our worldly substance is attended with a blessing from the Lord, at least to the man himself. But the text is the exposition of an established law in the universal government of God's providence. Our progress depends on our readiness to communicate of the stores already conferred upon us. The Christian's rule of spiritual advancement is not so much in proportion to the acquisitions which he makes of knowledge, as to the use that he makes of it. As we feed others our own souls are fed by God. It is in the nature of things, or rather, I should say, it is in the appointment of God, that it should be so. (*W. Dodsworth, M.A.*) *He that watereth shall be watered*:—"If we give so much we shall exhaust our resources," is a common remark. Don't be afraid of that, my friend. See that little fountain yonder—away yonder in the distant mountain, shining like a thread of silver through the thick copse, and sparkling like a diamond in its healthful activity. It is hurrying on with tinkling feet to bear its tribute to the river. See, it passes a stagnant pool, and the pool hails it. "Whither away, master streamlet?" "I am going to the river to bear this cup of water God has given me." "Ah! you are very foolish for that; you'll need it before the summer is over. It has been a backward spring, and we shall have a hot summer to pay for it—you will dry up then." "Well," says the streamlet, "if I am to die so soon, I had better work while the day lasts. If I am likely to lose this treasure from the heat, I had better do good with it while I have it." So on it went, blessing and rejoicing in its course. The pool smiled complacently at its own superior foresight, and husbanded all its resources, letting not a drop steal away. Soon the midsummer heat came down, and it fell upon the little stream. But the trees crowded to its brink, and threw out their sheltering branches over it in the day of adversity, for it brought refreshment and life to them; and the sun peeped through the branches, and smiled complacently upon its dimpled face, and seemed to say, "It is not in my heart to harm you"; and the birds sipped its silver tide, and sang its praises; the flowers breathed their perfume upon its bosom; the beasts of the field loved to linger by its banks; the husbandman's eye sparkled with joy as he looked upon the line of verdant beauty that marked its course through his fields and meadows—and so on it went, blessing and blessed of all. God saw that the little stream never exhausted itself. It emptied its full cup into the river, and the river bore it on to the sea, and the sea welcomed it, and the sun smiled upon the sea, and the sea sent up its incense to greet the sun, and the clouds caught, in their capacious bosoms, the incense from the sea, and the winds, like waiting steeds, caught the chariots of the clouds and bore them away—away to the very mountain that gave the little fountain birth; and there they tipped the brimming cup, and poured the grateful baptism down. And so God saw to it, that the little fountain, though it gave so fully and so freely, never ran dry. And where was the prudent pool? Alas! in its inglorious inactivity it grew sickly and pestilential. The beasts of the field put their lips to it, but turned away without drinking. The breeze stooped and kissed it by mistake, but caught the malaria in the contact, and carried the plague through the region. (*R. F. Horton.*) *Soul fatness*:—"If I desire to flourish in soul, I must not hoard up my stores, but must distribute to the poor. To be close and niggardly is the world's way to prosperity, but not God's (see ver. 24). Faith's way of gaining is giving. I must try this again and again; and I may expect that as much of prosperity as will be good for me will come to me as a gracious reward for a liberal course of action. Of course, I may not be sure of growing rich. I shall be fat, but not too fat. Too great riches might make me as unwieldy as corpulent persons usually are, and cause me the dyspepsia of worldliness, and perhaps bring on a fatty degeneration of the heart. No, if I am fat enough to be healthy, I may well be satisfied; and if the Lord grants me a competence, I may be thoroughly content. But there is a mental and spiritual fatness which I would greatly covet; and these come as the result of generous thoughts towards my God, His Church, and my fellow-men. Let me not stint, lest I starve my heart. Let me be bountiful and liberal; for so shall I be like my Lord. He gave Himself for me: shall I grudge Him anything? (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *God's law of recompense*:—"If I carefully consider others, God will consider me; and in some way or other He will recompense me. Let me consider the poor, and the Lord will consider me. Let me look after little children, and the Lord will treat me as His child. Let me feed His flock, and He will feed me. Let me water His garden, and He will make

a watered garden of my soul. This is the Lord's own promise; be it mine to fulfil the condition, and then to expect its fulfilment. I may care about myself till I grow morbid; I may watch over my own feelings till I feel nothing; and I may lament my own weakness till I grow almost too weak to lament. It will be far more profitable for me to become unselfish, and out of love to my Lord Jesus begin to care for the souls of those around me. My tank is getting very low; no fresh rain comes to fill it; what shall I do? I will pull up the plug, and let its contents run out to water the withering plants around me. What do I see? My cistern seems to fill as it flows. A secret spring is at work. While all was stagnant, the fresh spring was sealed; but as my stock flows out to water others, the Lord thinketh upon me. Hallelujah! (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 26. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him.—*Withholding corn.*—The text has to do with owners of corn and dealers in it. In Solomon's day famines were frequent, and were serious because trade communications between different countries were so uncertain. Then persons would buy up all the corn they could, so as to unduly raise the market-price. In relation to this greed in trade, there is a wonderful reserve of Holy Scripture. Mr. Arnot says, "In this brief maxim no arbitrary rule is laid down to the possessor of corn, that he must sell at a certain period and at a certain price: and yet the hungry are not left without a protecting law. The protection of the weak is entrusted not to small police regulations, but to great self-acting providential arrangements. The double fact is recorded in terms of peculiar distinctness, that he who in times of scarcity keeps up his corn in order to enrich himself is loathed by the people, and he who sells it freely is loved. This is all. There is no further legislation on the subject." Laws which interfere between buyer and seller, master and workman, are blunders and nuisances. The market goes best when it is left alone, and so in our text there is no law enacted and no penalty threatened, except that which the nature of things makes inevitable. A man may do as he pleases about selling or not, but he cannot escape from the curse of the people if he chooses to lock up his grain. But if it bring a curse upon a man to withhold the bread that perisheth, what a weight of curse will light upon the man who withholds the bread of eternal life. I. How CAN THIS BE DONE? 1. By locking up the Word of God in an unknown language, or by delivering and preaching it in such a style that the people shall not comprehend it. Illustrate by the practice of the Roman Church. But the terms of theology, the phrases of art, the definitions of philosophy, the jargon of science, are an unknown tongue to the young godly ploughmen, or praying shopkeepers. Simplicity is the authorised style of true gospel ministry. 2. By keeping back the most important and vital truths of revelation, and giving a prominence to other things, which are but secondary. Morality brings no food to hungry souls, although it is good enough in its place. Dissuasives from vice are not the bread of heaven, though well enough in their way. We need to have the great doctrines of grace brought forward, for the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit, and it is by preaching the truth as it is in Jesus that souls are won to Him. 3. By want of loving zeal in our labour. That which God blesses to the saving of sinners is truth attended by the earnestness of the speaker. Think of the preaching of Baxter. We are guilty of withholding corn unless we preach with a sympathising, loving, tender, affectionate, earnest, anxious soul. 4. By refusing to labour zealously for the spread of the kingdom of Christ and the conversion of sinners. 5. By refusing to help those who are working for Christ. I cannot understand how a man can love God when he only lives to heap up riches. II. THE BLESSEDNESS WHICH THOSE POSSESS WHO BREAK THE BREAD OF LIFE. To describe it is altogether beyond my power. You must know, and taste, and feel it. There are many blessednesses in doing good to others. 1. An easy conscience. 2. Comfort in doing something for Jesus. 3. Watching the first buddings of conviction in a young soul. 4. The joy of success. 5. The final and gracious reward. III. Now I have to OPEN THE GRANARY MYSELF. Hungry sinners, wanting a Saviour, we cannot withhold the bread from you! We tell you the way of salvation. 1. It is a satisfying salvation. 2. It is an all-sufficient salvation. 3. It is a complete salvation. 4. It is a present salvation. 5. It is an available salvation. (*Ibid.*) *The right to withhold.*—The text may be regarded as suggestive of a still higher thought than the one to which it is limited. If men have no right to withhold corn, what right can they have to withhold knowledge? If it is an evil thing to injure the body or expose it to danger, what is it to injure the soul or to

expose it to the peril of eternal loss? If it is wrong to keep back bread from the body, what must it be to keep back bread from the soul? An important doctrine is involved in the whole text; there are some things which a man may possess, as it were, for himself, and enjoy without sharing his delight with others; a man may have many precious stones, and may conceal them, and permit no eye but his own to look upon them, or hand to touch them but his own: so be it; the pleasure is a narrow and selfish one, and no great social consequences attend its enjoyment. On the other hand, it would seem as if no man could have private property in corn or in bread, in the sense of saying to the people, "I have it, but you shall not possess it; though you offer double its price I will not allow you to take it from me unless you multiply the price fivefold." A man may talk thus about diamonds and rubies, but he is not at liberty to talk thus about bread. A man may have great property in pictures, but it is questionable whether he should have any property in land in any sense that makes the people dependent upon his caprice as to whether it shall be cultivated and turned to the highest uses. It would seem as if light and air and land were universal possessions, and that all men were equally welcome to them. In the case of the land, it may be necessary that there should be temporary proprietorship, or some regulated relation to it so as to prevent robbery; but with such regulated relation proprietorship might well terminate. All this issue, however, can only be realised as the result of the largest spiritual education. It is difficult to persuade any great landed proprietor that he ought to surrender his rights for the good of the commonwealth. This can only come after years, it may be even centuries, of education of the most spiritual kind; or if it come earlier by statesmanship, it must also come justly, for even good rights may be created by faulty processes, and by mere lapse of time ownerships may be set up which have no original force. We shall never have a commonwealth founded upon righteousness and inspired by the spirit of patriotism until we are just to every interest which stands in the way of its realisation. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 28. He that trusteth in his riches shall fall.—*Trusting in riches*:—I. HERE IS A COMMON TENDENCY. Trusting in wealth is—1. Spiritually unsatisfactory. 2. Necessarily evanescent. II. HERE IS A TERRIBLE CATASTROPHE. "Fall." 1. Whence? From all his hopes. 2. Whither? To disappointment and despair. 3. When? Whenever moral conviction seizes the soul, whether before or after death. 4. Why? Because wealth was never a fit foundation for the soul. (*Homilist.*) But the righteous shall flourish as a branch.—*The secret of spiritual life*:—The righteous—and some such there have been even in the darkest periods of the world's history—the righteous "flourish as a branch." They lean not on their own stem and live not on their own root. From the beginning the same Jesus to whom we look was made known to faith. The manner and measure of making known truth to the understanding were in those days widely different; but the nature and the source of spiritual life were the same. But though all the real branches live, all do not equally flourish. Whatever girds the branch too tightly round impedes the flow of sap from the stem and leaves the extremities to wither. Many cares and vanities and passions wrap themselves round a soul and cause the life even of the living to pine away. When the world in any of its forms lays its grasp round the life, the stricture chokes the secret channels between the disciple and his Lord, and the fruit of unrighteousness drops unripe. It is only as a branch that Christians can flourish in this wilderness; they have no independent source of life and growth. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 29. He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind.—*Family life*:—I. PEACE SHOULD BE THE GRAND AIM OF ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE DOMESTIC CIRCLE. To trouble the house is an evil. II. THERE ARE SOME MEMBERS WHO BREAK THE PEACE OF THEIR DOMESTIC CIRCLE. They are the ill-natured, impulsive, false, selfish. III. THOSE WHO BREAK THE PEACE OF THEIR DOMESTIC CIRCLE ARE FOOLS. Their folly is seen in this—1. They get no good by it. 2. They get degradation by it. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Troubling one's own house*:—There are many ways in which this may be done. A man may, by the violence and irritability, the peevishness, fretfulness, and selfishness of his temper; he may by his avarice on the one hand, or by his reckless prodigality on the other—involving his family in starvation and suffering by opposite means; he may by intemperance, with all its horrid attendants; he may by sloth, and idleness, and indisposition to work, trouble his own house. "He shall inherit the wind." The expression is a very

strong one. Could any words more impressively convey the idea of loss, disappointment, and ultimate destitution and beggary? The result the man deserves. A man's family is his first charge from heaven, and ought to be his chief and constant solicitude. The only evil to be lamented is that he brings the destitution upon them as well as himself. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 30. *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life.*—*The fruit of the righteous* :—By this is meant his prayers, his charities, his good example, the virtues which compose his character and adorn his life, and all the efforts and influences by which he shows forth his wisdom in winning souls. To win souls in the best sense is to bring them to the saving knowledge of Jesus and subjugate them to His gracious dominion. An illustrious ancient philosopher said, "There is nothing great on earth but man, and nothing great in man but his soul." How will you compute the worth of a soul, or by what standard measure its greatness? Will you estimate it by its nature and origin, or by its power and capacities, or by the duration of its being, or by the cost of its redemption, or by the struggle for its possession and control, or by comparison with the splendid and precious? And if such is the value of the soul that worlds acquired could not compensate its loss, nor a material universe redeem its forfeiture, how excellent, beyond all power of language or of thought, the work of saving the priceless thing from destruction, and placing it among the crown-jewels of the King of kings! Look at the matter in another light. The soul is fallen, guilty, perishing; and he who rescues and restores it confers an incalculable and inconceivable benefit. Who shall limit the effect of your labour in saving a soul, or trace the blessed influence to an end? The beneficent effect of faithful Christian labour is an ever-swelling stream and an ever-enlarging growth. All heaven unites with all that is heavenly on earth in witnessing to the precious fruit of righteousness and the transcendent wisdom of winning souls. These considerations appeal to your charity, others appeal with equal force to your piety, your gratitude, your interest, your ambition. The Church was ordained for mutual help and the recovery of the lost. The saints live for others. God has blessed them, that they may be blessings to their race. (*J. Cross, D.D., LL.D.*) *He that winneth souls is wise.*—*Soul-winning* :—

I. THE OBJECT OF THE CHRISTIAN WORKER. It is a good thing in any work to have a clear perception of the object to be sought after. This brings our efforts into order and gives them consistency. If a man lose sight of a clear purpose he becomes listless, or at best mechanical. This is true pre-eminently in Christian work. They who undertake it purpose the gathering of immortal souls out of darkness into God's marvellous light. Ours is an apostolic mission. We are to catch men—souls. Their salvation is the centre of the target—the bull's-eye which we are to hit. We should be thankful for every token of success. If we can instruct the mind or store the memory with the things of God, ours is not lost work, but we are not to be content with these things; they may be means to the end, they are not the end itself. Our purpose is to bring the young to Christ, and Christ to them. The very magnitude of the purpose will give us encouragement if we look at it rightly. II. THE MANNER IN WHICH THIS WORK IS TO BE DONE. "Winneth." No force is to be employed. We cannot drive even little children into the fold of safety with dogs and stones. We want to lay hold of the heart, to gain the affections, and to do that we are to use the persuasive aspect of the gospel. A forced religion, if you can conceive it, is nothing worth. It is a sham flower. The examples of winning are found in the way in which the first disciples of the Saviour, and above all, the Saviour Himself, did their work. We are to live the truth, letting our whole life tell of what is right, and that beyond mistake; and yet over all love is to preside, softening our asperities, and making our wisdom peaceable as well as pure. Where there is a tender, winning spirit, then plain home-thrusts can be made that would be resented if they were mingled with the wrath of man. The attractive power lies even more in the evident tone of our teaching than in the sort of language we use. The root of persuasion lies in love to God and love to man, cherished by prayer, kindled and sustained by the Holy Ghost. III. THE CHARACTER REQUISITE FOR THIS GREAT WORK. "Wise." There is needed a high style of Christian character. We are to be good. The successful winner of souls must himself be already won for Christ. Our work is intimately bound up with our characters. Other things being equal, he will be most likely to bring others to Christ who himself is nearest to Christ. The influence of personal holiness steals in where nothing else can find a place. Our power with man will

be just in proportion to our power with God. Every devout effort to reach a holier life is a way of increasing our efficiency as winners of souls. We have also to be wise in the knowledge of God's truth. A man may know enough for his own salvation and yet not know so as to be able to impart effectively to others. Mighty in the Scripture, we shall be mighty for our work. And we are to be wise in the knowledge of the human heart. In their inmost nature the heart of a child and of a man are very much alike. Any one may gain this knowledge who, with a prayerful, sympathising nature, goes out into the world and keeps his eyes open. The teacher who knows his children can give to each his portion of meat in due season as none other can. Think of the encouragements to this work. Ours is everlasting work, its monuments are to abide for ever. We are working for eternity, polishing stones for the heavenly temple, searching for gems with which to deck the Saviour's crown. Think of the joy of the heavenly greeting, and the approval of the Lord, an approval not bestowed according to success, but according to fidelity. Upon no better purpose can you spend your life. Work for Christ that shall stand. (*Edward Medley, B.A.*)

Soul-winning:—He must be a wise man in even ordinary respects who can by grace achieve so Divine a marvel as win a soul. He that winneth souls is usually a man who could have done anything else if God had called him to it. He is wise—1. Because he has selected a wise object. 2. Because to win a soul requires infinite wisdom. 3. He will prove to have been a wise man in the judgment of those who see the end as well as the beginning.

I. THE METAPHOR USED IN THE TEXT. We use the word "win" in many ways, e.g., game of chance, juggling tricks, &c. It is used in warfare. Warriors win cities and provinces. The word was used to signify success in a wrestling match. There are secret and mysterious ways in which those who love win the object of their affections. Love is the true way of soul-winning. The Hebrew is, "He that taketh souls is wise," and the word refers to fishing, or bird-catching. We must have our lures for souls adapted to attract, to fascinate, to grasp.

II. SOME OF THE WAYS BY WHICH SOULS ARE TO BE WON. 1. A preacher wins souls best when he believes in the reality of his work. 2. When he keeps closest to saving truth. 3. Souls are won by bringing others to hear the Word. 4. By trying after sermon to talk to strangers. 5. By button-holing acquaintances and relations. 6. By writing letters. 7. The soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Winning souls:—Our Lord's estimate of the soul's value was exceeding high. His mind saw its spiritual nature as an object of supreme worth. In proportion as we are Christ-like will our views correspond, and our efforts also.

I. A GREAT WORK CONTEMPLATED. The definite business of all Christian workers. Great because—1. Of the value of the object. 2. Of the soul's capacities—for evil if not won, and for good if won. 3. Because the soul is the mainspring of life and action. **II. AN EFFECTUAL METHOD SUGGESTED.** Winning. 1. Christian work is a magnetic force. The centre of electric magnetism is the Cross. 2. The possibility here embodied. A work which all may undertake and accomplish. **III. A CHARACTER HERE DEFINED.** "Is wise." Because he benefits others. Because he gains a star for his own crown. Because he is laying up treasure in heaven. For he wins the approval of his God and the plaudits of the angels. The highest form of wisdom is to devote life's strength to gather pearls whose salvation will enrich with eternal wealth. (*J. F. Pridgeon.*)

The life of the good:—Note—1. **THE INVOLUNTARY INFLUENCE OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE.** The fruit of a life is the involuntary and regular expression of what the man is in heart and soul. All actions are not the fruit of life, inasmuch as man in the exercise of his freedom and, indeed, even by accident, performs actions that, instead of fully expressing, misrepresent his life. The regular flow of a man's general activity is the fruit, and this, in the case of a good man, is a "tree of life." It is so for three reasons. 1. It expresses real life. 2. It communicates real life. 3. It nourishes real life. **II. THE HIGHEST PURPOSE OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE.** "He that winneth souls is wise." This implies—1. That souls are lost. 2. That souls may be saved. 3. That souls may be saved by man. 4. That the man who succeeds in saving souls is wise. **III. THE INEVITABLE RETRIBUTION OF A GOOD MAN'S LIFE.** The recompense here is supposed to refer rather to the suffering he experiences in consequence of his remaining imperfections than of the blessings he enjoys as a reward for the good that is in him. The sins of good men are punished on this earth. The argument here is *à fortiori*—if God visits the sins of His people with punishment, much more will He visit the sins of the wicked. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

The soul-winner:—Most men are aiming and endeavouring to win something to which they attach great value. It may be

secular wealth, or earthly honour, or sensual pleasure. But there can be no wisdom in spending one's life in the endeavour to win any one of these things. The aim of Paul was to win Christ, and that should be our first aim too. Having won Christ for ourselves, our aim should be to win souls for Christ. I. HE WHO WOULD SUCCEED IN WINNING SOULS NEEDS TO BE WISE. It needs wisdom to succeed in the business of life. It needs a far higher and nobler wisdom to win souls. It is an exceedingly difficult thing to win men over from the ranks of sin and Satan to the ranks of God and His Christ. 1. The would-be soul-winner needs to be theoretically wise. He needs to be well informed. He cannot know too much and must be well informed on some very important matters, e.g., the sacred Scriptures, human nature, &c. 2. He needs to be practically wise—wise in action as well as in thought. He should deal largely in the most attractive and pathetic truths. He should carefully choose the most appropriate seasons. He should cultivate the most loving spirit and the most kindly manner. He should be much in communion with God. II. HE WHO DOES SUCCEED IN WINNING SOULS PROVES HIMSELF TO BE WISE. This is true looked at from several points of view. 1. Think of this work in relation to God. It is co-operation with God. 2. In its relation to those who are won. 3. In its relation to society. 4. In its relation to those who are engaged in it. In this world it brings them honour, pleasure, and culture. The blessings follow them into the future world. (*John Morgan.*)

Soul-winning.—I. WHAT IS A SOUL? We know little about a soul apart from the Bible. It teaches—1. That man is a compound being. 2. That the soul is indestructible. 3. Because indestructible, its value is infinite. II. WHAT IS MEANT BY WINNING SOULS? 1. The word "win" is used both in a good and bad sense. There are no mean tricks in winning souls. 2. "Win" is a warlike word: what powers are there striving for the soul? 3. Margin has, "he who taketh souls," implying the use of various allurements. III. HOW MAY SOULS BE WON? There must be—1. Adaptation. 2. The soul-winner must be careful not to offend the prejudices of those he seeks to win. 3. There must be method. The soul-winner must first have the love of Christ in his own heart. Then he must proclaim it patiently, lovingly, prayerfully, earnestly. This can be done in various ways. IV. IN WHAT SENSE IS THE MAN WHO WINS SOULS WISE? 1. In the ordinary sense. The man of business who has adaptation, method, diligence, &c., you say is a wise man. 2. Because he is preparing for the future. 3. Because he builds lasting monuments. 4. Because he pleases God. (*A. F. Barfield.*)

A wise work.—The Book of Proverbs may be compared to a basket of pearls. Each verse is complete in itself; the truth contained within it is of independent worth. I. WISDOM IS SEEN IN THE ATTEMPT TO WIN. The very effort itself is a proof of true wisdom. 1. The soul's position proves it. It is a perishing one. 2. Soul-winning is a noble work. A soul-winner need envy no one. His work surpasses all in true nobility. 3. Soul-winning is a lasting work, and therefore he who attempts it is wise. 4. It is a soul-profiting work. The man who imparts a blessing by the very act receives one. The way to be a joyful Christian is to be a working one at the winning of souls. 5. Winning souls is a work that tells on eternity. 6. Winning souls is a work which will influence you in heaven. II. WISDOM IS REQUIRED IN THE WORK OF WINNING. 1. The nature of the work as suggested in the text shows it. The word for "winneth" has three references. It refers to the snaring of birds, the catching of fish, the taking of a city. To the accomplishment of each of these wisdom is required. 2. The variety of disposition seen in souls requires it. III. HINTS AS TO HOW TO SET ABOUT WINNING SOULS. 1. They must be alarmed. 2. They must be allured. 3. They must be taken by the hand. 4. They who would win others must show that they themselves are won. (*Archibald G. Brown.*)

The wisdom of winning souls.—This text may refer to two things: wisdom in winning souls, or the wisdom of winning souls. He who assumes, as the errand and purpose of his life, the conversion of his fellow-men to Christ, has given the highest proof within his reach that he himself is a wise man. I. HE HAS SELECTED THE NATURAL FIELD FOR SUCCESSFUL HUMAN EFFORT. It is time to drop our suspicion in reference to honest work. Butler's definition says, "Happiness consists in a faculty having its proper object." That is, let any one of our powers fasten itself upon a legitimate end, and proceed at once unto vigour, and a feeling of true continuous joy will spring up from the mere exercise. Our reason is the happiest in reasoning; our judgment in deciding; our imagination in the poetic drawing of pictures; our affections in lavishing their love on chosen friends. There needs only to be added the element of success. That is, we must be able to

gain the ends we aim at. If we are balked, we are disappointed and discontented. Hence it is important for each man to understand his own adaptations and possibilities, so that he may seek right ends. Winning souls is the true work for human souls to do. For it flings into successful action the whole Christian man, body, mind, and spirit. There is intelligence in it; there is faith in it; there is hope in it; there is activity in it; there is excitement and exhilaration in it. And success is sure to follow fidelity. The old fable was that one who always carried a myrtle-wand in his hand would never grow weary in the way. But here is no fable. The love of Christ in the heart, and the zeal of Christ in the life, are what evermore satisfy, exercise, and rest the soul. II. THE SPECIFIC END TO BE REACHED IN WINNING SOULS EVIDENCES WISDOM IN THE CHOICE. Even a ministry of destruction has something grand about it, fearful as it seems to gaze upon, awful as it must be to exercise. But a ministry of relief is better than any of retribution. It has in it all the sublimity of power, and then the additional grace and glory of help, the beauty of being serviceable. A ministry of salvation is simply transcendent. It deals with a man's highest nature, and touches upon the destinies of eternity. Everywhere God seems to look upon human beings as just so many souls. To save a man is to deliver a fellow-man from sin and hell, and bring him to holiness and heaven. To save a soul is to incorporate with the eternal destiny of a sentient and reasoning being a new spring and force of exultant and exhilarant life; to quicken all its susceptibilities; to renew the will into a profitable obedience to God; to unfold all the capacities of intellect and affection. In a word, to save the soul is more than to create the soul. III. THE PROPRIETORSHIP WE GAIN IN THE SOULS WE INSTRUMENTALLY WIN. We love what we work for more than what costs us nothing. Value to you is measured by this sum of yourself you have put in a possession. A soul we help to save possesses a value to us unlike that of any other soul. For we gain a kind of proprietary right in it. God lets us feel so. 1. Present companionship. The soul we lead into the joys of this new life becomes our helper, and returns the benefit. If we put into active, beneficent, useful, attractive life any human soul, may we not share all the benedictions its sweet, gentle, Christlike career is scattering around it? 2. Eternal communion. Those who are with us here will go with us to be in our company hereafter. IV. THE GRAND AWARDS OF THE GOSPEL FOR THIS WORK SHOW THE WISDOM OF WINNING SOULS. 1. The growth of personal graces. He who watereth others shall be watered himself. He who carries a lantern for darkened men finds his own path lit the clearest. 2. The day of approval. Every soul which saves a soul shares in the satisfaction his work gives to the Master. Oh, the exquisite joy of that supreme moment when a Christian labourer presents a new prince or princess to Christ, the King of Glory, in the midst of heaven! (*C. S. Robinson.*) *The wisdom of winning souls:*—The estimate which men form of spiritual things is very different from that which they form of temporal things. An individual who is the victim of temporal evil excites our pity, and kindles our compassion, but an individual perishing in ignorance, and dying in sin, excites no compassion. I. THE OBJECT HERE PROPOSED TO OUR BENEVOLENT SYMPATHY AND REGARD—THE SOUL OF MAN. The soul of man—who of us understands it? Fix attention on the nature and frame of the human soul. In nature it is not material, it is spiritual and immaterial. The body is divisible, the soul is a homogeneous substance—it is indivisible, insoluble, inseparable. The soul is not matter. We know of only two substances, matter and spirit, flesh and mind, body and soul—these make up the whole of what we know to have any existence in the universe of God. Philosophers have speculated much about the locality of the soul in the body. All that we know is, that although the soul dwells in matter, it is perfectly and entirely distinct from it. 1. We may endeavour to form some estimate of the soul by noticing its Maker, its origin. Think of it as formed for eternity; as occupying all the attributes of Jehovah in its formation; as made in the true image of God; as made next in rank and degree, though equal in blessedness, to the angelic multitude. Though the soul is not in the condition it was in when it came from the hands of its Maker, still there is that about it that tells us something of what it was; there are traces of primeval glory and dignity. Such is the faculty of reason, and the power of conscience. 2. Form a notion of the soul's capacities, and faculties, and properties. Think of its power of thought; of the recording pen of memory; of the tablet of the heart; of the creations of genius; the glow of enterprise; the light of reason; all proving to us that the soul of man is spiritual, intellectual, immaterial, immortal. Think, too, of its power of knowledge. The soul of man

wanders on and on, exploring invisible and distant objects. 3. Think of the power of pleasing. How it can charm by description, dazzle by comparison, enliven by wit, convince by argument, thrill, captivate, and carry away by eloquence. Think of its power of acting on matter, in the glow of painting, in the symmetry of architecture, in the beauty of sculpture, in the enchanting intonations of the human voice. 4. The soul must be of inestimable value, for its redemption has been effected by Jesus Christ. 5. Think, too, on the endless duration of the soul's existence. Only one word can be applied to the duration of the human soul—it is the word Eternity. The soul never dies. II. THE CONDUCT DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT, IN REFERENCE TO THIS OBJECT, AND RECOMMENDED TO OUR ADOPTION. We can only win souls as instruments and accessories. Christ is the ransom of the soul. The French commentator paraphrases the text thus: "He that sweetly draweth souls to God, maketh a holy conquest of them" (Diodoret). 1. We are to endeavour to win souls by instruction. Knowledge is wanted, is agreeable. Knowledge is to be communicated, now, from mind to mind, from one to another. The man who has knowledge is bound to communicate it to the man who has not. 2. We must do it by persuasion. For the soul is not only ignorant, but perverse. Its ignorance calls for illumination, and its perverseness and obstinacy call for entreaty and persuasion. Seriousness of manner, combined with affectionateness of spirit, are the charms we are to employ, the artillery we are to command. We are to clothe our words with plainness, seriousness, and affection. 3. It is our duty to endeavour to win souls by admonition. It is necessary, sometimes, to rebuke with all authority and all earnestness. III. THE EULOGIUM WHICH THE TEXT PRONOUNCES ON THE CONDUCT OF THOSE WHO WIN SOULS. He is "wise." 1. Scriptures say that man is wise who saves his own soul. 2. The text pronounces that man wise who is instrumental in winning the souls of his fellow-creatures. Such a man, in his conduct, is promoting the honour, and glory of God. Such a man connects himself with the coming in of the mediatorial reign of our Immanuel. Such a man is the best friend of the human race, and most effectually promotes the welfare of mankind around him. (*J. Beaumont.*) *The work and responsibility of the ministry:*—The work of the ministry is an awful thing. What shall we say of the responsibility which belongs to him who, at an age when he could neither deceive himself nor be deceived, chooses an office to which he professes to be divinely called, even the cure of souls? I. THE WORTH OF SOULS. The very word "souls" is startling. The soul is a direct emanation from God—a breath of God, a spark, so to call it, of Deity. It is a living soul. It has infinite capacities. See the estimation in which God holds it; especially in giving His Son for its redemption. See not the original redemption only, but also all the subsequent acts of grace. Then most guilty must he be who despises his own soul, and in spite of all this array of mercy, chooses death rather than life. II. THE WINNING OF SOULS. 1. The agency which the Divine wisdom has seen fit to employ in this business. 2. The means which this agency is commissioned to use. In preaching the doctrine of Christ, we are wielding a weapon of omnipotent might. 3. While with fidelity we preach Christ, we must do it with the earnestness which its importance demands, and the affection which its subject warrants. 4. And we must also labour to the utmost to give no offence, that the ministry be not blamed. But this line of conduct is strictly within the limit of the faithful preaching of the Word. What are the noble and glorious results of a ministry so conducted? Such a pastor both saves himself and them that hearken. (*Joseph Haslegrave, M.A.*) *The mission work of winning souls:*—1. Missionary associations and enterprises take their rise out of the most enlightened and comprehensive views of human nature. 2. Missionary Societies employ the only expedient which has ever been known to act on human nature with the power of effecting a moral transformation. 3. Missionary enterprises proceed on the most enlightened views of the harmony between the instrumentality of man and the agency of God in the work of winning and saving souls. 4. The instrumentality employed secures the most glorious of all results to the instruments themselves. 5. Missionary operations are conducive, in a high degree, to the prevalence of the spirit of Christian union. (*H. F. Burder, M.A.*) *Winning first your own soul, then other souls:*—The charity that wins a soul begins at home; and if it do not begin there it will never begin. The order of nature in this work is, "save yourselves and them that hear you." But though this charity begins at home, it does not end there. From its centre outward, and onward all around, like the ripple on the surface of the lake, compassion for the lost will run, nor stop until it touch the shore of time. Winning immortal

souls is work for wise men, and we lack wisdom. On this point there is a special promise from God. Those who need wisdom and desire to use it in this work will get it for the asking. The wisdom needed is different from the wisdom of men. It is very closely allied to the simplicity of a little child. Much of it lies in plainness and promptness. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Two ways of wisdom*:—I. IN THE CHOICE OF THE OBJECT OF PURSUIT. When men fix on that which is of real and unquestionable value to the exclusion of other things. There can be no doubt of the preference due to the soul's interests, even on the low standard of calculated good. Common sense must admit the wisdom shown in making the soul of man the object of the pursuit of men. If true of man's own soul, equally true of the souls of others. He who makes the soul the object of his pursuit, and aims at doing good to men through those means that are spiritual, finds that his benevolence is exercised under circumstances very favourable.

II. IN DETERMINING THE MANNER IN WHICH THAT OBJECT SHALL BE PURSUED. In selecting, out of many plans, that which is the most likely to succeed. Of these plans for winning souls some are of men's devising, and bear the marks of their original. There is one, and one alone, of God's ordaining. Of men's schemes there is—1. The religion of morality, which aims at men's reformation, by addressing the reason in the form of arguments and conviction. 2. The religion of sentiment, which addresses itself to the feelings, and endeavours to win the affections by exhibitions calculated to melt and touch and soften the sensibilities of men's natures. And there is the Divine religion of the gospel, which aims at the conversion of the soul through faith. This system speaks to the heart and to the conscience; and this is the way of wisdom in winning souls.

(*Henry Raikes, M.A.*) *The winner of souls*:—I. WHAT IS HERE IMPLIED? 1. That these souls might be lost, else they could never be won—would never need to be won. 2. That these souls, though lost, are not irrecoverably lost; they may yet be won. 3. That human instrumentality is to be employed for the accomplishment of these ends; the work is the Lord's.

II. THE WINNER OF SOULS HAS A TWOFOLD AIM. The immediate aim is the salvation of souls; the ultimate aim is the glory of God. III. THE GAIN IS PERPETUAL. These souls once won are won for ever. Leave it to other men to build palaces and rear memorial pillars, to add house to house, and call their lands by their own names; be yours the God-like task of contributing to rear the palace of the Great King—of adding another and another stone to that goodly structure—of setting up pillars in the eternal temple that shall stand when all others have fallen—of brightening the diadem of Jesus with gems rescued from ruin—with stars that shall shine for ever and ever. Be it yours to win souls; for the price of them is far above rubies, more precious than the gold of Ophir—to rear plants that shall flourish and bloom for ever in the paradise of God.

(*Thos. Main, D.D.*) *A word to winners of souls*:—I. HE IS WISE WHO WINS SOULS, FOR HE HAS A BLESSING IN THE WINNING. 1. The best way to keep our own souls in health is to seek those of others. 2. The best way to benefit our brethren is to seek souls. II. HE HAS A BLESSING IN THE WON. Every soul we win for Christ—1. Is a token of His favour. It proves we have used the means in the right way. 2. Causes, or should cause, more watchfulness. We are examples to them. 3. Is an additional helper for us. What sweet communion have we with our spiritual fathers and spiritual children! III. HE HAS A BLESSING STORED UP IN HEAVEN. 1. Exalted position. "Shine as stars." 2. Perpetual preferment. "For ever and ever." 3. Unbounded delight. (*R. A. Griffin.*)

The winning of souls:—To win souls is a proof of wisdom, and it is also an exercise of wisdom. There is the wisdom of winning souls to be considered, and also the wisdom in winning souls. I. THE WISDOM OF WINNING SOULS. 1. Human souls require to be won. They are at first in a lost state. They are lost as being without knowledge, without righteousness, without happiness, and without hope. 2. But the souls of men may be recovered. The method of their salvation is arranged and completed in the gospel. 3. See the wisdom of this work in its innate grandeur and excellence. In a shipwreck or a fire what strenuous efforts are made to save property, or to save life: how much more to pluck these brands from the burning. 4. See what an enduring work it is. Other things, saved, may perish again; but a soul saved will be secure for ever. 5. See the reward it brings to the happy agent himself. It gratifies his benevolence, and his piety—it secures him affection and love—it will ensure immortal honour (*Dan. xii. 3.*). 6. It is an essential part of our duty as Christians. The task of winning souls is committed to us. A dispensation of

the gospel is entrusted to us. We are bound by the pledges of our allegiance and gratitude to Christ to employ ourselves in this work. II. THE WISDOM IN WINNING SOULS. 1. There are difficulties peculiar to the work. (1) In the perversity and prejudices of those whom we seek to save. (2) In the snares and oppositions of the world, skillfully managed by the great adversary of our souls. (3) In the ignorances, jealousies, and inconsistencies of the agents themselves. 2. The required wisdom consists of several important constituents. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *The supreme wisdom*:—The literal meaning of these words is "He that catcheth souls is wise." The figure is taken from the manner in which the fowler catches the birds. He that goeth into the wilds of nature, where the spirits of men are rude and untamed, and employs his skill in attracting and winning them to cultivation and righteousness, is wise. The enterprise of capturing a soul for this end is replete with honour, and brings such distinction that rank and talent have been proud to consecrate themselves to the work. The ostensible end of all enlightened government is to win souls, and that administration is the wisest whose measures are fitted to win the largest number to civilisation and from vice to morality. The legislature that does not apprehend the moral as well as the social and civil wants of a people is either barbarous or wicked—as it may happen to rest on ignorance or selfishness. Let us select any form of philanthropy—the genius of that form really is the recovery of the soul. You never give a beggar alms without some reference to his mind. Whether you would or not, you must include the relief of his mind when you are moved to lighten his bodily distress. The true philanthropist gives scope to this mental sympathy. Why does he seek to alleviate the mental and physical disorders of his fellow-men? Because they stand in the way of their moral nature. He does not stop when he has rescued a family from starvation. "He that winneth souls is wise." He makes the world better and increases the resources of his country's greatness. In treading a low neighbourhood of the East-end of London, you find a family bearing every mark of extreme distress. You enter what more resembles a den than a room. But in that foul and wretched hovel there would be a lot more than meets the eye. Amid that squalor, and in such a home, there would be scenes of the greatest crime and ruin, and if the children were turned out on society they would be like so many prowling wolves. But suppose you are the instrument of checking this current of evil and wickedness. What have you done? In rescuing these poor creatures from poverty you dispel one of the chief incentives to crime by waking up energies laid asleep by destitution or wickedness. You have, by sending the children to school, closed one door of ignorance and vice, and opened another of intelligence and virtue. You have won souls to knowledge and integrity. But here I ask, Have we done all when we have reached this step? Have governments arrived at the limit of their possibilities when they have made men free and prosperous? Has philanthropy executed her mission when she has supplied the needy with bread and gathered about them conditions of health? As if a man had drawn up a careful design for a mansion, had laid the foundation, carried up the walls, and then had neglected to cover the building, the result being that when the winds and rain came the splendid fragment, wanting the coherence and support of a roof, falls away and collapses. Long experience has convinced me that unless education be roofed and crowned with religion, the principles of human character, however wisely laid, however right in themselves, will not prevent the character from collapsing. The principles of human character will go down, and the soul is not won, but lost. The doctrines Christ came to reveal or enforce, and the great atoning work which it was the business of His life to finish were illustrated upon a miniature scale in order that we might be ready and able at once to study their operation. The truths He proclaimed were for all time and for the world, but the application was first directed by Himself to a small district of Palestine. He taught us how to win souls. He addressed Himself to every human want. Unlike all other benefactors I have ever seen or heard of, He did not give Himself to one department of charity. He raised the whole man. And the dispensation of His goodness was as practical as it was beneficial. He satisfied the hungry, but He never pauperised indolence. Why do I mention these particulars? In order to show that our heavenly Lord took care of the earthly life—its animal and social wants; and in His daily teachings He included those earthly virtues of truth, purity, industry, loyalty, and love. But the basis of His superstructure of philanthropy was the salvation of the soul. It must be the aim of all power professing beneficence to take the soul to the arms of God. The soul not only belongs to

God, everything belongs to Him; but the soul has a future of immortality, and the brief life of a few years here must train it for the life of ages. To win a soul is not to bring it into bondage, it is to take it and keep it for God. The Saviour was ever removing obstacles in the way to heaven, and the supreme obstruction—sin—He laid down His life to remove. All His earthly lessons, all His parables and teachings, lead up to heaven like the steps of a ladder. And I think you cannot begin this winning process too soon. The perceptions of a child are far in advance of its tongue, although that begins early. Its temper and will are apt scholars before its tongue can frame a syllable. It will learn more in the first three years than you can teach it in the next ten. (*E. E. Jenkins, M.A.*)

The wise man wins souls:—It is supposed that a man is wise because he wins souls. That is not the teaching of the text. He wins souls because he is wise. Let us look at the matter in this way: there is a necessity in wisdom that it shall win souls. Wisdom always wins. The wise man may never speak to a soul, and yet he may win it. This is not the picture of an ardent evangelist running to and fro in the earth upon the vague and general mission of winning souls. That is the popular misunderstanding of the text. The real interpretation is that if a man is wise he will by the very necessity of wisdom win souls, draw them to him, excite their attention, compel their confidence, constrain their honour. There is a silent conquest; there is a preaching that never speaks—a most eloquent preaching which simply does the law, obeys the gospel, exemplifies the spirit of Christ, works that spirit out in all the detail of life, so swiftly, patiently, sympathetically, completely, that souls are won, drawn, saying, Behold, what virtue is this! what pureness, what charity, what simplicity, what real goodness and beneficence! This must be the right doctrine, because it comes out in the right line. So then the scope of the text is enlarged. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Souls to be won, not driven:—This wise man does not drive souls—he wins them. Souls cannot be driven. We may attempt to drive them, and therein show our folly, but it is of the nature of the soul that it be charmed, lured by angel-like beauty, by heavenly eloquence, by mighty persuasion of reason. The soul that is driven offers no true worship; nay, as we have just said, the soul can defy the driver. The body can be driven to church, but not the soul. It does not follow because a man is sitting in church that he himself is there. A child forced to church is not at church. The house of God, therefore, should be filled with fascination, attraction, charm, so that little children should long to go to it, and it should be a deprivation not to go there. The wise man would not drive men to any form of goodness, though he is bound to prohibit them under penalty from certain forms of social evil, because those forms involve the health, the prosperity, and the best advantage of others. (*Ibid.*)

How to win others to Christ:—Soul-winning is a blessed possibility to all who are "filled with all the fulness of God." 1. Be prayerful. Have regular hours for secret communion with God. 2. Study the Scriptures. 3. Be gentle. Lead rather than drive. Speak the truth in love. Never argue. 4. Be polite. Haste or brusqueness will repel. A courteous, affable manner is well-nigh irresistible. 5. Be courageous. Trusting the guidance of the Spirit, never be afraid to speak to any soul. 6. Leave the result with God. It is unwise ever to waste time in regrets. A rebuff may mean a soul under strong conviction. Some seeds take longer to sprout than others. Remember you are not working for yourself, but for God; that without Him you could do nothing; and to Him belongs all the glory. (*G. F. Pentecost.*)

How to win:—In Chicago, a few years ago, there was a little boy who went to one of the mission Sunday-schools. His father moved to another part of the city, about five miles away, and every Sunday that boy came past thirty or forty Sunday-schools to the one he attended. One day a lady who was out collecting scholars for a Sunday-school met him and asked him why he went so far, past so many schools. "There are plenty of others just as good," said she. "They may be as good, but they are not so good for me," he said. "Why not?" she asked. "Because they love a fellow over there," he answered. Ah! love won him. "Because they love a fellow over there!" How easy it is to reach people through love! (*D. L. Moody.*)

Soul-winning:—Some preachers think only of their sermon; others think only of themselves: the man who wins the soul is the man who aims at it. (*Dean Hook.*)

Success in soul-winning:—Success in soul-winning is only given to skill, earnestness, sympathy, perseverance. Men are saved not in masses, but by careful study and well-directed effort. It is said that such is the eccentric flight of the snipe when they rise from the earth, that it completely puzzles the sportsman, and some who are capital shots at other birds

are utterly baffled here. Eccentricity seems to be their special quality, and this can only be mastered by incessant practice with the gun. But the eccentricity of souls is beyond this, and he had need be a very spiritual Nimrod, a "mighty hunter before the Lord," who would capture them for Christ. *The best news*:—When

Chalmers was in the very zenith of his popularity in Glasgow, and crowds were gathering every Sabbath round his pulpit, he was walking home one evening with a friend, who told him of a soul who had been converted through the instrumentality of a sermon which he had preached. Immediately the tear-drop glittered in the good man's eye, and his voice faltered as he said, "That is the best news I have heard for a long time. I was beginning to think that I had mistaken the leadings of providence in coming to your city; but this will keep me up."

The joy of winning souls:—Bishop Harold Browne of Winchester once said that among all the joys which had been given him in the course of a long and busy life, none had come with a deeper thrill, or had remained so freshly in his heart, as the joy he had felt when, as a young curate, he had been for the first time the means, through God, of leading a soul to peace and trust in Christ. This is a joy which all can have, if they ask for guidance in the work of influencing others for God. (*F. E. Toyne.*)

The winner of souls is wise:—A learned divine was asked, on his death-bed, what he considered the greatest of all things. His answer was, "It is not theology, nor controversy; it is to save souls." Doddridge wrote, "I long for the conversion of souls, more sensibly than for anything besides." Matthew Henry says, "I would think it a greater happiness to gain one soul to Christ than mountains of gold and silver for myself." Brainerd said, "I cared not where nor how I lived, or what hardship I went through, so that I could but gain souls to Christ." Ward Beecher says, "As the pilot boats cruise far out, watching for every whitening sail, and hover through day and night all about the harbour, vigilant to board every ship that they may bring safely through the Narrows all the wanderers of the ocean, so should we watch off the gate of salvation for all the souls, tempest-tossed, beating in from the sea of sin, and guide them through the perilous straits, that at last, in still waters, they may cast the anchor of their hope." The Christian is to do good, not by force or hardness, but by gentle persuasion and persevering kindness. To win, as in a game, implies skill in adapting the means to the end. 1. He who would be successful in winning souls to Christ must be considerate and thoughtful. 2. Another qualification is courage. 3. Another is tender, unaffected sympathy. It is said that if a piano is struck in a room where another stands unopened, one who should place his ear near it would hear a responsive note within, as though touched by the hand of an unseen spirit. Such is the power of sympathy. (*John N. Norton.*)

A motto for a new year:—Our first object should be to win Christ. That being attained, we cannot adopt a better motto for life than this, "He that winneth souls is wise." 1. He is a wise man who sets this before him as the object for which to live. No pursuit is more worthy of our energies. No pursuit yields a better return. 2. He who would be successful in this work must go about it wisely. He must himself be wise unto salvation. He must have the tact to discern his opportunities, and rightly direct his appeals. The word "winneth" (margin, "taketh") is an allusion to the hunter's craft. 3. A wise adaptation to the circumstances and temperaments of those we seek to bless is needed in this work. It will not answer to deal with all alike. Men are not to be taken in the lump and treated after some patent method of moral mechanics. Every human being is an individual, and must be so reckoned and laboured for. No labour or self-denial will be misspent in this holy cause. (*C. A. Davis.*)

Ver. 31. Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth.—*Judgment here*:—Two ways of explaining this text. 1. Of the happiness which God has appointed for goodness, it has pleased Him that some portion should accrue in this world; and of the misery which is the wages of sin, a much more abundant portion. 2. Even the righteous shall be recompensed (that is, punished) for their sins, in the earth, much more the wicked, with a sorer punishment. The argument is, if the good and pious often suffer for the faults they fall into, for the wicked to expect an exemption from suffering is a most vain and absurd expectation. The first is the more natural and obvious sense of the passage. This world is not a place of retribution. It is a place where men may suffer for their virtues and escape for their wickedness; and this so frequently as even to afford some ground and pretence for questioning which course a man had best take if this life

were his all. A man might say, "Let us live to ourselves, and seize all the good within our reach, whatever be the consequences to others." Such a plan the wise king pronounced to be foolish and shortsighted, even on the principles of worldly prudence, and without taking another life into the account. After all the arguments from suffering virtue and successful wickedness have been urged and admitted, the balance of good will be found to be with the good, and evil unknown to them, to beset the path and track the steps of the wicked. The words imply that any one may see this who will attend carefully to what passes around him. It is in every one's mouth that "honesty is the best policy." The upright and regular part of the community is too sagacious and too strong for the schemer at last. The honest and good gain upon them and pass them, even in the career of worldly success. There is a reward in this life for a strict adherence to temperance and all the other branches and laws of self-government. But this doctrine is apparently opposed to such teachings as are found in Eccles. ix. 11. But it may be noticed that in Proverbs the rule is dealt with, and in Ecclesiastes the exceptions to the rule. Such exceptions there will always be. Part of the text declares that the punishment of sin in this world is more certain than the reward of virtue. And the fact is so. The recompense of the wicked does not tarry. Their course is soon interrupted by evil and suffering. We can generally predict the end of the wicked in this world. Licentiousness and debauchery lead to disease and embarrassment. Of dishonesty it may be said, its resources are soon dried up, and the plenty it procures is but for a moment. From the laws of nature and the appointments of Divine providence there is no escape. The true end and design of all the Divine afflictions and all earthly sufferings is our improvement. He adapts His methods to our wants, and appoints us such trials as we can bear. But the promise of recompense in the earth is perceived to belong to them; is fulfilled in them in many respects. (*A. Gibson, M.A.*)

CHAPTER XII.

VER. 1. Whoso loveth instruction loveth knowledge; but he that hateth reproof is brutish.—*Worthless and attentive hearers:*—Attention to the precepts and wise counsels of this book is urged by—1. The advantage which such precepts are of, to improve a man's carriage and conversation. 2. The fact that they are a safeguard against the mischiefs of evil company. 3. That they are the best preservatives of health and long life. 4. In the ways of wisdom is to be found peace with God, with man, and with our own conscience. But Solomon tells us there are several sorts of men who will be never the wiser nor better for what he says. (1) Such as are stupid, and have no palate to relish anything but sensual, earthly pleasures. (2) The froward man, who is under the dominion of his lusts and passions. (3) The proud man. For he is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason. This conceit is commonly the child of prosperity. (4) The negligent and slothful man. He will not be at the pains to cultivate his mind with the instructions of wisdom. (5) Men of a vain and frothy spirit, who love to turn serious things into ridicule; jesters and scorers. The qualifications our divine philosopher calls for are diligence and attention. He would have his hearers apply their hearts and incline their ears to the words of his mouth. Where were, and where are now, these schools of wisdom, where diligent hearers may be instructed in the laws of God and a good life? They are found in our schools of literature and in our churches. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *The love of instruction:*—It is by instruction that knowledge comes. He who fancies he has all in himself will never learn. In proportion to the love of instruction will be the acquisition of knowledge. The love of instruction implies humility. It argues a sense of ignorance and need of information. It is a common thing for men to allow pride to cheat them of much valuable knowledge. That the knowledge of duty as well as of truth is here to be included may be inferred from the latter part of the verse. "Refusing reproof" is "brutish," as irrational, senseless, unworthy of a creature endowed with intellect; distinguished by reason from the beasts of the field, and distinguished from them too by his immorality. There may also be comprehended in the expression the absence of what every rational creature ought

to have—spiritual discernment and taste; the destitution of all right sentiment and feeling in reference to God and Divine things. This is the character of him whom Paul denominates “the natural” or animal man, who “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.” (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Instruction implies discipline*:—Instruction, as the contrast teaches, chiefly implies discipline—that most needful course for acquiring spiritual knowledge. The submission of the will is the only road to Christian attainment. The irritable pride that hates reproof, as if it were an affront to be told of our faults, argues not only want of grace but also want of understanding. (*C. Bridges.*) *Reproof*:—The knowledge and the wisdom which this book recommends is a practical and devout thing, having for its foundation the fear of God, and then obedience will come out as the result. If a man loves the end he will love that which leads to the end. Reproof is instruction under another form. It is instruction with an unpleasant face; but not the less necessary and salutary. Some men can hardly be managed in any other way than by just having the rein kept tight upon them. The Bible never permits us to lose sight of our immediate connection with God. The world and human society is not a mere machine. It is a great thing to get the idea of law, and that law is working out its results; but it is a greater thing to get before the mind the idea of the personal superintendence of the Lawgiver. Under His superintendence “virtue will be its own reward,” and vice and wickedness will bring their own condemnation and punishment. The good or benevolent man does not think about the results to himself and his actions towards others; he does the thing out of those impulses, those Divine and holy instincts, which inhabit that religious nature of his: and God has His eyes upon the good, and the result is the favour of God comes upon him and overshadows him. A man may get on by wickedness for a while wonderfully; but in general the triumph of the wicked is short. When he seems to be established he is always in fear. (*T. Binney.*) *Hating reproof*:—A story is told of a Scotch minister, who, for a month or two after his appointment to a country parish, used to treat his hearers to sermons of a very flowery description. Finding, however, that continual preaching of this kind is fruitful of little benefit, he changed his style to something less catching but more practical, and also, with the view of adding weight to his exhortations, inaugurated the “schedule system” of making collections. On one occasion a young lady collector called on an erstwhile benevolent old spinster belonging to the congregation, and began the attack with the insinuating schedule; but no sooner was her mission comprehended than the countenance of the spinster hardened. “Na, na!” she exclaimed. “Wha wud gie a ha’penny to yon man? I likit um weel enouch when he used to tell us aboot the works o’ nature, an’ the bonnie flo’ers, an’ a’ that; but whan he begoon to speak till us like yon aboot oor fau’ts, I couldna dae wi’ um.” *Reproof in preaching*:—One thing I have against the clergy, both of the country and in the town; I think they are not severe enough on their congregations. They do not sufficiently lay upon the souls and consciences of their hearers their moral obligations, and probe their hearts and bring up their whole lives and action to the bar of conscience. The class of sermons which I think are most needed are of the class which offended Lord Melbourne long ago. Lord Melbourne was seen one day coming from a church in the country in a mighty fume. Finding a friend, he exclaimed, “It’s too bad! I have always been a supporter of the Church, and I have always upheld the clergy. But it is really too bad to have to listen to a sermon like that we have had this morning. Why, the preacher actually insisted upon applying religion to a man’s private life!” But this is the kind of preaching which I like best, the kind of preaching which men need most; but it is also the kind which they get the least. (*W. E. Gladstone.*)

Ver. 2. **A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord.**—*The blessing of the righteous and misery of the wicked*:—There is a marked difference between the righteous and the wicked both in their characteristics and in their condition. I. THE TEACHING OF THE PASSAGE REGARDING THE BLESSING OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. The righteous has the favour of the Lord (ver. 2). In the Divine favour is the guarantee of all good. 2. The righteous is firmly fixed (ver. 3). 3. He is wiser in his speech (ver. 6). 4. His blessings are continued to his children (ver. 7). 5. He wins the confidence of his fellow-men. In spiritual privileges, at least, the good man gains advantages of inestimable worth. Some of the advantages of the righteous man are specified. Because he is industrious, he—(1) Shall have plenty of bread. (2) His labour shall not be without results. (3) He shall somehow come

out of trouble triumphant. (4) He shall be satisfied with good (vers. 11-14). The longings of the child of God are so controlled and directed that in time they are fully met. They keep themselves within the channels of the Divine will, and so are never stranded and wrecked by their self-will. II. THE PASSAGE PICTURES THE MISERY OF THE WICKED. This consists, first of all, in the disapproval of God; then in the disapproval of his fellow-men. By their misdeeds the wicked forfeit the esteem of the public, and this is a blow they find hard to bear. A wrong course of conduct is also sure to ensnare one in difficulties. Each sin is a misstep which brings one into new entanglements. One lie necessitates another to bolster it. The immediate results of sin may not be seen to be evil. But the end is sure to come. Sin persisted in brings ruin. The end of unrepented wrong is sure. The law of moral turpitude cannot be broken. III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF BOTH THESE CLASSES. The wicked are marked by a dislike for reproof. Their very sinfulness is an indication that they are void of understanding. They are self-conceited. An indifference to the opinions of others, a certain self-assurance, an unwillingness to learn, these are some of the characteristics of the wicked. Another almost certain indication of wrong-doing is the keeping of bad company. The wrong-doer "followeth after vain persons." He naturally seeks those of his own kind. His conduct is all in the line of injury to others. Selfishness has in it the seeds of cruelty. Self is steadily seeking its own gratification, and does not stop at any injury to others who chance to stand in its way. The characteristics of the righteous are—1. He loveth knowledge. He is honestly seeking to find out what it is best to do. Hence he gladly welcomes correction. He does not shrink from reproof. 2. His thoughts are just. He desires to treat all rightly and to give every man his just dues. His thoughts even are under control in this matter. Not only does he not do others wrong, but he has no wish to; nor even does the thought of evil rise up in his mind. (*A. P. Foster.*) *The man of wisdom*:—I. THE RELATION OF THE MAN OF WISDOM TO GOD. He is in favour with God, whereas the man of unwisdom is condemned of God (ver. 2). The ethics of Proverbs is most deeply religious. All moral obligations derive from the Creator, and the foundation of wisdom is over and over again stated to be in the fear of the Lord. Many a moral teacher fails because he tries to induce men to act right without first setting their hearts right. II. THE TRAITS OF CHARACTER BELONGING TO THE WISE MAN ARE SET FORTH PARTIALLY HERE. 1. He is truthful. 2. He is receptive. 3. He has good practical judgment. 4. He is industrious. 5. He is kind-hearted. III. THE WISE MAN IN HIS RELATIONS WITH OTHER MEN IS HERE SET FORTH. 1. He has honour from others. That man only has true honour whose name is honestly revered. Such reverence comes only to that nobility of character whose spring is in that heart-wisdom which consists in the fear of the Lord. 2. Such a character brings honour to others. 3. Such a man is safe from embroilments with others. A man without principle is always getting into troubles from which the righteous escape. IV. THE RESULTS TO HIMSELF OF THE WISDOM OF THE GOOD MAN. 1. The wise man has a return for his devotion to that which is good. Satisfaction is dealt out to him. 2. In this passage the character of the result is described. 3. Stability is specially noted as one of the rewards of the good. (*D. J. Burrell.*) *The good man*:—By a good man we are to understand a benevolent man; that is, a man who always wills happiness to others and carries forward his benevolence into the active form of beneficence. The good man is not an intellectual fop, or a moral phenomenon, but is well disciplined, thoroughly chastened, adjusted in all his faculties, and sometimes concealing exceptional excellences under a general average of fine nature; that is to say, instead of living in his eccentricities and making a reputation out of his occasional excellences he brings down these mountains and irregularities and smooths them so as to consolidate a general average of true worth. Whoever does good is an ally of God; he is in immediate co-operation with Him. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.—*False affection*:—Delilah's character, though but briefly drawn, is not without terrible significance. In her we see a violation of the ties of life and properly-poised affection which makes us start; and yet by many among us this fault is committed and scarcely considered to be a fault. We hardly know a case of more affecting and heartless treachery than that of Delilah. Under the guise of love and in the apparently trusting confidence of affection a man is induced to tell a secret. There is a mixture of treachery,

hypocrisy, cruelty, and perseverance about the whole which is remarkable. Yet is the case so uncommon after all? Delilah's conduct has few parallels in Scripture. It is a fearful contradiction—treachery and hypocrisy stand among its foremost features; conspiring with others, and those cruel and vindictive foes, against one who trusted her, is a strong aggravation of the evil. It would be scarcely worth while to dwell on a character like Delilah's were it not that it bears on a certain condition of things among ourselves which we continually have brought under notice, especially among our poor—the determination to defend and protect at all hazards, through evil report and good report, the husband and near relative from the mere fact of his close relationship. It is often difficult to know how to treat persons whose prominent features are so beautiful and attractive, when the deeper lines of the character may perplex us by an indifference to truth, the glory of God and the zeal needful for His service, which deviation from such a line of uncompromising affection and defence necessitates. Illustrate the devotion of a woman who has a drunken husband, of a woman who has been wronged, or whose husband is a criminal. These are cases of heroism. What is the history of these feelings, these sad perversions of rectitude, and what are the remedies which we may apply to them? What is the object of these intense natural affections? Are they intended to blind the eyes to the faults of those we love? No. And yet the moral sense of mankind condemns Delilah, and honours these other women. They may be partially in error; no doubt they are, but the question is, Which tendency is right? The very object of strong natural affections is to give a tendency or prejudice which may, to a certain degree, supersede the mere dictum of justice. We are too weak, too frail, to endure the latter only. If we cannot stand at God's tribunal neither can we endure man's ignorant and partial judgment, when there is no counter impulse given by some other prejudicing principle. I say it with reverence; the justice of God is tempered by the love of the Incarnation, and the stern decree of bare judgment is toned down or reversed by the examination of motives and impulses, circumstances and temptations, which He alone can do who “knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust.” The office of natural affection in us gives a strong impulse in favour of, not adverse to, the dependent. And when justice decides that the extenuating circumstance is not enough to acquit, it forces itself on the forlorn and forsaken, goes out of court with the condemned criminal, sits by his side in mournful attitude in the cell, sings sweet words of sympathy through the dreary hours of punishment, “weeps with him who weeps,” and makes his sorrows its own. We can so little trust the keen eye of the most impartial justice. We need to see with some other eye. None looks so deeply as that of affection. It lets nothing escape which can defend, justify, save. Its object and aim—its interest is to defend from false blame; to detect palliating circumstances; to discover motives which may extenuate. And do we not need that protective power? Are any of us sufficiently fair judges of one another to allow of our demanding a state of society without the protecting influence of this strong and mighty advocate? Evidently we should value, not despise, the existence and exercise of natural affections. And more than this, they are to be brought into practical account. We should in every way encourage those who are pursuing that line of self-devotion and unselfish affection by showing them how beautiful we esteem their conduct, and how well it may be the stepping-stone to higher self-sacrifice to Him who yearns for their heart's devotion. (*E. Monro.*) *The queen of the household* :—Here a virtuous woman is spoken of, and a virtuous woman is a true woman, chaste, prudent, modest, loving, faithful, patient in suffering, and brave in duty, keeping within the orbit of her sex, and lighting it with all the graces of womanhood. The language of the text implies two things. I. THAT SHE EXERCISES A CONTROL OVER HER HUSBAND. A “crown” is the insignia of rule. A virtuous woman rules by the power of her love and the graces of her life. Beauty, tenderness, love, purity, are the imperial forces of life, and these woman wields.

II. THAT SHE CONFERS A DIGNITY UPON HIM. A crown is a dignity. 1. Her excellence justifies his choice. 2. Her management enriches his exchequer. 3. Her influence exalts his character. Her gentle spirit and manners smooth the roughnesses of his character, refine his tastes, elevate his aims, and round the angles of his life. (*Homilist.*) *A husband's crown* :—Woman's place is important. God has made it so, and made her fit for filling it. Woman became the completion of man's capacity and title—she became his crown. Let woman be content with the place that God has given her. The adaptation of the feminine character to be the companion and complement of man is one of the best defined examples of that

designing wisdom which pervades creation. When the relations of the sexes move in fittings of truth and love, the working of the complicated machinery of life is a wonder to an observing man, and a glory to the Creator God. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *Virtuous woman*.—The moral element is not excluded from this term "virtuous," but it is latent and assumed rather than active and pronounced. It must be understood that the moral element is indeed essential; yet that does not impair the true etymology of the term. By "virtuous" we are to understand a woman of power—so to say, a virile woman; a woman of great capacity and faculty, of penetrating sagacity, and of ability to manage household and other affairs. She is a high-minded woman, giving the very best help to her husband in all the difficulties of life, crowning him with grace and with light, such a woman as he can trust in perplexity and exigency of every kind. She will not be less an intellectual woman or a woman of strong mind because she is morally pure, spiritually sympathetic, and religiously tender. She will not be less a philosopher because she is a true child of God. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *A good wife a crown to her husband*.—A remarkable instance of helpfulness in a wife is presented in the case of Huber, the Geneva naturalist. Huber was blind from his seventeenth year, and yet he found means to study and master a branch of natural history demanding the closest observation and the keenest eyesight. It was through the eyes of his wife that his mind worked as if they had been his own. She encouraged her husband's studies as a means of alleviating his privation, which at length he came to forget; and his life was as prolonged and happy as is usual with most naturalists. He even declared that he should be miserable were he to regain his eyesight. "I should not know," he said, "to what extent a person in my situation could be beloved; besides, to me my wife is always young, fresh, and pretty, which is no light matter." Huber's great work on "Bees" is still regarded as a masterpiece, embodying a vast amount of original observation on their habits and natural history. Indeed, his descriptions read rather like the work of a singularly keen-sighted man than of one who had been entirely blind for twenty-five years at the time at which he wrote them. The married life of Faraday furnishes another example. In his wife he found, at the same time, a true help-mate and soul-mate. She supported, cheered, and strengthened him on his way through life, giving him "the clear contentment of a heart at ease." In his diary he speaks of his marriage as "a source of honour and happiness far exceeding all the rest." After twenty-eight years' experience, he spoke of it as "an event which, more than any other, had contributed to his earthly happiness and healthy state of mind. . . . The union (he said) has in no wise changed, except only in the depth and strength of its character." And for six-and-forty years did the union continue unbroken; the love of the old man remaining as fresh, as earnest, as heart-whole, as in the days of his impetuous youth.

Ver. 5. *The thoughts of the righteous are right: but the counsels of the wicked are deceit.*—*On right thoughts* (see also chap. xxiii. 7):—We are in reality what we are in our hearts, and not what we may be only in appearance. There may be a fair show, while many bad things prevail within. The Bible, therefore, teaches a religion for the heart, and it is alike suitable and necessary for every heart. We are required to keep our hearts with all diligence, but no one can be kept right who is not first set right. If a person is as he thinketh in his heart, his very salvation must depend much upon his thoughts. A due management of these must have a bearing upon everything else. I. *SOME REMARKS ON HUMAN THOUGHTS.* What an inconceivable number of these are continually rising up in all minds! Then what a mind His must be who knoweth all these thoughts! Our thoughts are weighed and judged by Him who searcheth all hearts. Thoughts pertain to moral agents, and partake of the moral qualities of the mind that breeds them. Self-scrutiny and self-knowledge are therefore important duties. Good thoughts are such as God approves according to His Word, and they are productive of good deeds. Evil thoughts are sinful in His sight, polluting to the soul, and productive of transgressions. Human thoughts differ much in their origin and cause, and this not only in different minds, but also in the same mind. There are suggested thoughts, such as are communicated by some outward agency. There are also voluntary thoughts, such as are deliberately pursued and cherished. And there are involuntary thoughts, such as seem to come and go at random. Some are momentary, others are more permanent; others, again, grow into settled designs, full determinations of the will. Evil minds ought to be under right government and control, so as to furnish prompt restraint and influence to its

numerous and various thoughts. II. THE ASSERTION CONCERNING THE THOUGHTS OF THE RIGHTEOUS. Consider what it does not mean. All the thoughts of the righteous are not perfect and true. And it is only thoughts that are properly the righteous man's own for which he is responsible. The text expresses what is the true and proper influence of religion upon the mind that receives it. That influence is of the right kind. Hence the great importance of being brought under the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, since it is precisely this which rectifies the mind. 1. True religion hath a prevailing influence upon the thoughts concerning God. Righteous men's thoughts of God are reverential and devout. 2. True religion hath a prevailing influence upon the thoughts of the righteous concerning themselves. Their thoughts awaken them to a sense of their high destiny, quicken them in the path of duty, make them watchful against temptation, and lead to prayer and communion with God. Because the prevailing bias of the unrighteous is wrong, they disregard these things. Each one should therefore inquire, What is the character and tenor of my thoughts? (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *The righteous and the wicked contrasted:—*I. IN THEIR THOUGHTS. Thoughts are the factors of character, and the primal forces of history. By thought man builds up his own world. The righteous man is righteous in heart: therefore his thoughts will be right. The heart is the spring of the intellect. The thoughts of the wicked are false. He lives in an illusory world. II. IN THEIR SPEECH. Words are the incarnations, the vehicles, and the weapons of thought. The words of the wicked are mischievous. The words of the righteous are beneficent. III. IN THEIR STANDING. "The wicked are overthrown and are not, but the house of the righteous shall stand." The wicked are insecure. The righteous are safe. IV. IN THEIR REPUTATION. The good commands the respect of society. The consciences of the worst men are bound to reverence the right. The evil awakes the contempt of society. Servility and hypocrisy may bow the knee and uncover the head before the wicked man in affluence and power, but deep in the heart there is contempt. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The righteous man and right:—*The verse has been rendered, "The policy of the just is honesty; the wisdom of the wicked is cunning." This rendering marks more strikingly the intended distinction. The righteous man, in all his thoughts, keeps by what is right. He deals in rectitude, as opposed to deceit; and from his actions you may know his thoughts. The wicked man thinks one way and acts another. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *The thoughts of the righteous:—*As odorous flowers. give out their fragrance so that we may inhale it, so the thoughts and affections of our spiritual nature go forth to be inbreathed again by other souls. On this ground, Jesus taught that when the Holy Spirit dwells in man, streams of holy influence flow forth from that man's spirit. If a frail flower breathes sweetness into the general air, how much more a holy man? If a cesspool emits a pestiferous influence, how much more a bad man? (*J Pulsford.*) *The difference between the thoughts of the righteous and the wicked:—*There is a difference between good thoughts that ascend from the frame of our hearts and those that are injected from without. For instance, a gracious man's holy thoughts ascend from the spiritual frame that is within his soul; but now a wicked man may have holy thoughts cast into him as a flash of lightning in the night, which doth not make a day; neither doth the injection of some holy thoughts argue the frame of his heart spiritual and holy. When he hath been hearing a warm sermon, then he thinks with himself, heaven deserves his choice, and eager pursuits; this is but from without, and therefore doth not argue that he is spiritual. (*Ibid.*) *The thoughts of the righteous are right:—*Take a river—let it be dammed and stopped up, yet, if the course of it be natural, if the vent and stream of it be to go downward, at length it will overbear, and ride triumphantly over: or let water that is sweet be made brackish by the coming in of the salt water; yet, if it naturally be sweet, at the length it will work it out. So it is with every man; look what the constant stream of his disposition is, look what the frame of it is; if it is grace, that which is now natural and inward to a man, though it may be dammed up, and stopped in such a course for a while, yet it will break through all at the last; and though there be some brackish and some sinful dispositions that may break in upon a man, yet by the grace of God he will wear them out, because his natural disposition, the frame of his heart, runs another way. (*Ibid.*)

Ver. 7. But the house of the righteous shall stand.—*Virtuous kindred:—*I. In the first place, the CIRCUMSTANCE OF BELONGING TO THE HOUSE OF THE RIGHTEOUS, IS A GREAT SECURITY THAT THE EARLY PRINCIPLES WHICH SO COMMONLY DECIDE THE

CHARACTER OF THE MAN, HAVE BEEN THE SUBJECTS OF A JUDICIOUS AND ANXIOUS ATTENTION. The child of such a house cannot have been left to collect from the chance companions of after-life those important truths upon the knowledge of which so much depends. II. It is a second advantage belonging to the house of the righteous THAT THE COMPANIONS AND EXAMPLES FURNISHED BY IT ARE LIKELY TO HAVE A POWERFUL INFLUENCE IN DEEPENING EVERY GOOD IMPRESSION, and recommending every valuable lesson received in it. III. It is another privilege belonging to an early education in the house of the righteous THAT VIRTUE IS THERE SEEN FROM THE FIRST IN ITS OWN LOVELY FORM, AND ITS INFLUENCE FELT TO BE FULL OF CALM AND LASTING ENJOYMENT. IV. Another of these advantages IS THE ADDITIONAL MOTIVE FELT IN SUCH A CONNECTION TO RESPECTABLE CONDUCT—to conduct which may recommend us to the continued regard of the numerous and friendly witnesses who, with anxious interest, are watching our progress. (*J. G. Robberds.*)

Ver. 8. A man shall be commended according to his wisdom.—*Appreciation better than praise*:—There are persons in this world—and the pity is that there are not more of them—who care less for praise than for appreciation. They have an ideal after which they are striving, but of which they consciously fall short, as every one who has a lofty ideal is sure to do. When that ideal is recognised by another, and they are praised or commended for something—let that something be important or not—in its direction, they are grateful, not for the praise, but for appreciation. An element of sympathy enters into that recognition, and they feel that they have something in common with the observer who admires what they admire, and praises what they think is most worthy of praise. (*Alliance News.*)

Ver. 9. He that is despised, and hath a servant, is better than he that honoureth himself, and lacketh bread.—*Domestic modesty and display*:—Vanity, or love of display, is one of the most contemptible and pernicious passions that can take possession of the human mind. Its roots are self-ignorance, its fruits are affectation and falsehood. The text refers to this in families, and when it takes possession of households it often destroys domestic comforts. I. THERE ARE DOMESTIC COMFORTS WITHOUT DISPLAY. In many an unpretending cottage there is more real domestic enjoyment than can be found in the most imposing mansions. II. THERE IS DOMESTIC DISPLAY WITHOUT COMFORTS. Many sacrifice comforts for appearances. They all but starve their domestics to feed their vanity. They must be grand though they lack bread. This love of appearance, this desire for show, is making sad havoc with the homes of old England. III. THE CONDITION OF THE FORMER IS PREFERABLE TO THAT OF THE LATTER. It is better to have comforts without show than show without comforts. 1. It is more rational. 2. It is more moral. 3. It is more satisfying. (*Homilist.*) *Vain honouring of self*:—Amid the changes of this world, I have seen a man who, having known better days, had been nursed by luxury, and reared in the lap of fulness, outlive his good-fortune, and sink down into the baseness and meanness of the deepest poverty—in such a case it seems to be with men as with plants. Naturalists find it much less easy to teach a mountain flower to accommodate itself to a low locality than to persuade one which by birth belongs to the valleys to live and thrive at a lofty elevation; so there seems nothing more difficult to men than to descend gracefully. . . . And thus I have seen such an one as I have described, when he had lost his wealth, retain his vanity, continuing proud in spirit when he had become poor in circumstances. (*T. Guthrie, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast.—*The sin of cruelty to animals*:—First remove some prejudices against dealing with this subject. 1. This is a trifling subject, which is unworthy of being made a matter of grave and deliberate consideration. But if this subject constitute a matter of moral and religious obligation at all, it is not to be thrust out of view because it is not of the most universal and commanding importance. It belongs to the great duty of mercy, and pertains to the exercise of dominion, one of the high and peculiar distinctions belonging to human nature. 2. The outcry against cruelty to animals is a mere piece of sentimentalism or affectation, and that what is so called is little if at all felt by the creatures that are pitied. But many of the animals exceed ourselves in their susceptibility of impressions, having acuter powers of hearing, a more enlarged and distinct vision and a keener smell. There is a difference between a tyrannic exercise of power and a mild and gracious management of the lower

creatures. What shall we say of acts of gratuitous cruelty, of unmitigated tyranny, and of unrighteous injury? 3. It is urged that this subject cannot be treated from the pulpit with the hope of much good. It is surely a part of the benevolent work of the pulpit to turn the kindly feelings of humanity towards the brute creation, and thereby to rescue them from the tormenting cruelty which would embitter their existence and sport with their lives. State some arguments to enforce the duty of abstaining from the cruel treatment of the inferior animals. I. KINDNESS TO THE BRUTE CREATION IS A COMMAND OF GOD (Exod. xxiii. 5; Deut. xxii. 6, xxv. 4). The will of God for the treatment of His irrational creatures is—1. That labouring animals are to be well fed and cared for in return for their toil and work. 2. That every animal in a situation of oppression, peril, or insuperable difficulty is to be relieved, assisted, and delivered; and that without any regard to whom it may belong, though to your worst enemy. 3. That no animal is to be tormented merely for our pleasure, or have its rational instincts thwarted, or its accustomed and long-acquired habits denied. Every one must admit the equity and justice of these rules. II. AN ARGUMENT AGAINST CRUELTY TO ANIMALS IS PRESENTED BY THE EXAMPLE OF GOD. We are required to be merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful. This extends to our treatment of the inferior animals, since God shows us an example of mercy in His dealing with them (Psa. cxlvii. 8, 9). But ample as is the evidence which the brute creation furnishes of the goodness of God, we do not see them enjoying at present all the happiness which God intended that they should possess. They are involved in sufferings consequent upon the fall of man, being committed, as it were, to the same fortune with us. We ought to take pity on them the more on this account as our blameless fellow-sufferers, and diminish, as far as we can, the necessary evils of their lot. This is to resemble our heavenly Father. III. ANOTHER ARGUMENT MAY BE DEDUCED FROM THE TENDENCY OF SUCH CRUELTY TO HARDEN THE HEART AND TO INJURE THE TEMPER AND FEELINGS OF THOSE WHO HABITUALLY COMMIT IT. A man who is cruel in the treatment of his animal cannot be a good husband, a kind parent, a humane neighbour, or a gentle and tender friend. Men cannot change their dispositions like their dress; whatever disposition they encourage, it will become habitual and natural. Cruelty to animals makes men sullen, rude, ferocious, wrathful, apt to strike, impatient of contradiction, and prone to every evil work. IV. CRUELTY TO ANIMALS IS A MEAN AND CONTEMPTIBLE VICE TO WHICH THERE IS NO TEMPTATION. Almost any sin can say more for itself than this can. What but a love of vulgar and low excitement gives zest to sports in which animals are baited, tormented, mangled, and destroyed? V. THE CRYING INJUSTICE OF SUCH CRUELTY MAY BE URGED. We have no right to abuse the inferior creation, although we have a right to use them. Some of the causes which lead to the commission of cruelties upon the brute creation are, mere thoughtlessness and wantonness; avarice; love of excitement, from which come the strifes and conflicts of the bear-garden, the race-course, the chase, the cock-pit, &c. (*John Forbes.*) *Cruelty to animals*:—The word “regard” may either apply to the moral or to the intellectual part of our nature. It is the regard of attention, or the regard of sympathy. If the regard of attention could be fastened strongly and singly on the pain of a suffering creature as its object, no other emotion than the regard of sympathy or compassion would in any instance be awakened by it. With the inertness of our reflective faculties, rather than with the incapacity of our senses the present argument has to do. It is on behalf of animals that we plead; those animals that move on the face of the open perspective before us. The sufferings of the lower animals may, when out of sight, be out of mind. But more than this, these sufferings may be in sight and yet out of mind. This is strikingly exemplified in the sport of the field, in the midst of whose varied and animating bustle, that cruelty which all along is present to the senses, may not for one moment have been present to the thoughts. Such suffering touches not the sensibilities of the heart, just because it is never present to the notice of the mind. We are not even sure if, within the whole compass of humanity, fallen as it is, there be such a thing as delight in suffering for its own sake. Certainly much, and perhaps the whole of this world's cruelty, arises not from the enjoyment that is felt in consequence of others' pain, but from the enjoyment that is felt in spite of it. Without imputing to the vivisectionist aught so monstrous as the positive love of suffering, we may even admit for him a hatred of suffering, but that the love of science had overborne it. This view in no way is designed to palliate the atrociousness of cruelty. Man is a direct agent of a wide and continual distress to the lower animals, and the question is, Can any method be devised for its alleviation? The whole inferior

creation groaneth and travaileth together in pain, because of man. It signifies not to the substantive amount of the suffering whether this be prompted by the hardness of his heart or only permitted through the heedlessness of his mind. These sufferings are really felt. The beasts of the field are not so many automata without sensation, and just so constructed as to give forth all the natural signs and expressions of it. These poor animals just look and tremble and give forth the very indications of suffering that we do. Theirs is unmixed and unmitigated pain.

1. Upon this question we should hold no doubtful casuistry. We should not deem it the right tactics for this moral warfare to take up the position of the unlawfulness of field sports or public competitions. To obtain the regards of man's heart in behalf of the lower animals, we should strive to draw the regards of his mind towards them. 2. We should avail ourselves of the close alliance that obtains between the regards of his attention and those of his sympathy. For this purpose we should importunately ply him with the objects of suffering, and thus call up its respondent emotion of sympathy. This demands constant and varied appeals from the pulpit, the press, and elsewhere. (*T. Chalmers, D.D.*)

The sin of cruelty towards the brute creation.—What the sun is to the natural, that Christianity is to the moral world—its universal benefactor. Christianity regulates the intercourse between man and man. It forbids hatred, malice, and revenge. It allows no one to take advantage of his height of station to oppress or domineer over his humbler brethren. But it also condescends to undertake the cause of the brute tribe against the cruelty of man, both high and low, rich and poor. The tendency of the laws God has enacted for their treatment forbids occasioning unnecessary pain to the most obnoxious or destructive of them; while towards the positively useful we live under actual obligations. We are not merely forbidden to do these harm; to do them good is a cheap return for the services they perform in our behalf. To treat humanely animals in our possession constitutes a part of true religion, and will be viewed by God accordingly. The words of the text imply that he who "regardeth not the life of his beast" forfeits all pretensions to the character of a righteous man. By this single breach of morality he betrays a degree of guilt for which the most unexceptionable conduct to those of the same flesh and blood can make no amends. The common sources of cruelty. 1. Inattention. This must not be confounded in point of guilt with the diabolical spirit of cool, intended cruelty, but the pain it occasions may be equally severe. Children are in peculiar danger of sinning under this head. 2. Prejudice. In many families children are taught to treat the greater part of reptiles and insects as if they were highly dangerous or injurious, and of course to be destroyed, or at least to be avoided with horror. The young implicitly believe the unfair reports, and act accordingly. Once give a child the liberty of inflicting death on certain species of inferior beings, and you will soon find he indiscriminately wages war on all; what has been a habit will ere long become a pleasure. If parents would preserve their children free from the stain of cruelty, let them beware how they make them the executioners of their vengeance on even the most noxious or unsightly creatures, the crushers of ants and spiders, or the trampers on the caterpillar or the earth-worm. 3. Selfishness. A selfish man may plead that he means no harm to the creatures he is maltreating; but to get his pleasure, he cares not what sufferings he occasions them. Refined methods of barbarity are keeping certain creatures so as to render them choicer food; the wagers laid at races, &c. There are those who, however considerate they may be towards their own property, care little how they treat the property of others when lent or hired out. Such incur not only the charge of cruelty; they are also chargeable with ingratitude or deceit; and under these circumstances their sin becomes "exceeding sinful." (*H. A. Herbert, B.A.*)

The feelings of animals.—This verse might be rendered, "A righteous man knows the feelings of beasts." He gives them credit for feelings; he does not look upon them as merely so much animated matter, but as standing in some relation to himself, and the more complete his ownership the more considerate ought to be his treatment even of the beasts he owns. Even when the wicked man supposes himself to be merciful there is cruelty in his tenderness. A wicked man cannot be gentle. Men should remember this, and distrust all the gentleness which is supposed to attach to men who are without conscience. The tenderness of such men is an investment, is a political trick, is a bait to catch the unwary, is an element of speculation. Rowland Hill used to say, in his quaint way, that he would not value any man's religion whose cat and dog were not the better for his piety. This is the beauty of the Christian religion: it flows throughout the whole life, it ramifies in every department of the existence

and carries with it softness, purity, sympathy, kindness. The young lions roar, and get their meat from God. The universe must be looked upon as a great household belonging to the Almighty, regulated by His power and His wisdom, and intended to exemplify the beneficence of His providence. Life is a mystery which remains unsolved, bringing with it claims which none can safely or religiously set aside. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The duty of mercy to animals*:—If we look in the final, total, and eternal teachings of Scripture for our moral standard, nothing is more clear than that mercy is one of the chief duties of man, as it is one of the main attributes of God. In the deluge provision is made that the animals should be saved as well as man; and in the renewed covenant we know that God said (Gen. ix. 2). Thus early is attention called to the connection of animals with man, the use of animals to man, and the dominion over animals by man. God's care for them, man's duty to them, are constantly inculcated. Take, for instance, the Mosaic law. How exquisite is the consideration which it shows for the creatures of God's hand! "If a bird's nest chance to be before thee, thou shalt not take the dam with the young, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days." Did any other lawgiver like the mighty Moses thus care for the curlew in the furrow and the mother-linnet in the brake? "Thou shalt not seethe the kid in its mother's milk. I am the Lord." "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn." Why? Doth God care for oxen? Assuredly He does, for His are "the cattle upon a thousand hills." "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together." Why not? Because it is contrary to the law of natural justice, since, if the two animals be yoked together, an unfair share of the burden must fall upon the one or upon the other. Could God have taught more clearly to us than He thus did by the mouth of the great leader of His people that we must be merciful because our Father in heaven is merciful? Turn again to the fresh, bright, vivid poetry of the Psalmist of Israel. How beautiful, how tender, throughout the Psalms, are the repeated allusions to the world of creatures! Or turn again to that magnificent, dramatic, and philosophic poem of the Book of Job. The care of God and the love of God for the creatures He has made convince Job of God's care for him. Turn again to the calmer and graver wisdom of the wise King Solomon. "There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise" (chap. xxx. 24-28). And when we turn to the New Testament we find, as we should have expected, that this perfect love for all God's creatures appears most fully and tenderly in the words and teaching of the Lord Himself. The lessons of the wise earthly king are taught us with creeping and laborious creatures. He made the bee and the ant teach their lessons to us; but the heavenly King taught us rather from those birds of the air, which "toil not, nor spin," but are employed, like angels, in offices of love and praise. There is nothing in all human language more touching and more beautiful than Christ's illustration of God's tenderness in the works of nature, the flowers of the field, and the creatures of the air. Here is a legend of Christ, which may be no legend, but a true story: By the hot roadside, in the blistering sunlight, the vultures eyeing it, and ready in a moment to sweep down upon it with their fetid wings, lay a dead dog—one of the hated, despised, ownerless dogs of an Eastern city—a dead pariah dog, the most worthless thing, you might think, that all creation contained—a pitiable and unlovely spectacle; and round it were gathered a crowd of the wretched, loathing idlers of the place—coarse, pitiless, ready, like all the basest of mankind, to feed their eyes on misery and on ugliness, as flesh-flies settle on a wound. And one kicked it, and another turned it over with his foot, and another pushed it with his staff, and each had his mean, unpitying gibe at the carcase of the dead, helpless, miserable creature which God had made. Then, suddenly, there fell an awe-struck silence on these cruel, empty triflers; for they saw One approach them whom they knew, and whom, because He was sinless, many of them hated while yet they feared. And He came up, and, for a moment, the sad kingly eyes rested on the dead creature in the blistering sunlight with the vultures hovering over it, and then He turned His eyes for a moment to the pitiless, idling men who stood there looking at it, and, breaking the silence, He said: "Its teeth are as white as pearls"; and so He went His way. Where they in their meanness could gloat on what was foul, and see nothing but its loathliness, His holy eye—because it was the eye of loving mercy—saw the one thing which still remained untainted by the deformity of death, and He praised that one thing. And, leaving them smitten into silent shame before His love and His nobleness, He once more went His way. Turn to the most ancient Greek poems, the "Iliad" and the "Odyssey" of Homer. In the "Iliad" the horses of the great hero Achilles

weep human tears for their great master's death. In the "Odyssey" we have the return of Ulysses, ragged, unknown, desolate, after his twenty years of wanderings. He is in the guise of a beggar. No one recognised him of all whom his bounty fed—not his servants, not his wife, not his only son; but Argus knows him—Argus, the dog with which he has hunted as a boy—Argus cannot forget him as human beings can. Outstretched, neglected, before the hall door lies the poor old hound, and he no sooner hears the footsteps of his master whom he had known as a boy long years before, than he looks up and strives to crawl to his feet, licks his hand, and dies. And at the saddest moment of Athenian history, when the people of Athens were flying to Salamis from the mighty hosts of Xerxes, leaving their desolate homes to be spoiled and burned, the one great nation which raised an altar to pity had time to remember and to record how one poor dog swam all the way across the straits of the salt sea after the boat which carried his master to the island shore. And the Jews, too, had well learned this lesson of their great books. The historian of the book of Tobit is not afraid to tell us that when the Jewish boy left his father's house for his long and perilous journey his dog went with him; and how, when he returned with the friendly angel, the dog still followed the angel and the youth. One of the most celebrated of all the rabbis, the writer of the earliest and most sacred part of the Talmud, was Rabbi Judah the Holy. He was afflicted with intermittent agonies, and the Talmud tells us this legend of him: On one occasion a calf destined for sacrifice fled lowing to him, and thrust his head upon the rabbi's knees. "Go," said the rabbi, pushing the animal from him; "for sacrifice is thy destiny." "Lo!" said the angels of God, "the rabbi is pitiless; let suffering come upon him." And he was smitten with sickness. But on another occasion, when his servant was dusting his room, she disturbed a brood of young kittens. "Let them alone," said the rabbi, kindly; "disturb them not, because it is written, 'God's tender mercies are over all His works.'" "Ah," said the angels, "he has learned pity now; and, therefore, let his sufferings cease." All the best Christian history is full of the spirit of mercy; all the saints of God, without exception, have been kind to animals, as most bad men have been unkind. It was observed in the earliest centuries of Christianity that the hermits living in the desert their pure and simple and gentle lives had strange power over the wild creatures. Those quiet and holy men so controlled them that the creatures near them lost their wildness, and the fawn would come to them, and the lion harmed them not. Some of God's holiest saints in later times had this strange, sweet gift of inspiring animals with the confidence which they had before—to our shame—they had been taught distrust by the cruelties and treacheries of fallen man. So it was with St. Francis of Assisi. He called all creatures his brethren and his sisters. "My little sisters," he said to the twittering swallows who disturbed him by chasing each other through the blue Italian sky, as he preached in the open air in the market-place of Vercelli—"my little sisters, you have said your say; now be silent, and let me preach to the people." We are told how on one occasion he gave up his own robe to save two lambs which were being led to the slaughter; how a little lamb was one of his daily companions, and how he sometimes preached upon its innocence to the people. At Gubbio a leveret was brought to him, and when he saw the little creature his heart at once was moved. "Little brother leveret," he said, "why hast thou let thyself be taken?" And when the little trembler escaped from the hands of the brother who was holding it and fled for refuge to the folds of the robe of St. Francis, he set it free. A wild rabbit which he took, and afterwards set free, still returned to his bosom as though it had some sense of the pitifulness of his heart. On another occasion he put back into the water a large tench which a fisherman had given him, and he bade it swim away; "but," says the legend, "the fish lingered by the boat until the prayers of St. Francis were ended, for the saint obtained great honour from God in the love and obedience of His creatures." (Dean Farrar.)

A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast:—It is said of God that He remembered Noah, and every beast (Gen. viii. 1); yea, such is His merciful providence, that He watcheth not only over men, but beasts; and a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast. Nay, Xenocrates, a very heathen, who had no other light but what the dim spectacles of nature did afford, is commended for his pitiful heart, who succoured in his bosom a poor sparrow that, being pursued by a hawk, fled unto him, and afterwards let her go, saying that he had not betrayed his poor suppliant. And such is the goodness of every just man, that he is merciful to his very beast; alas, it cannot declare its wants, nor tell its grievances, otherwise than by mourning in its kind; so that to an honest heart its dumbness is a loud language, crying out for relief. This made David

rather venture upon a lion than lose a lamb (1 Sam. xvii. 34). Jacob will endure heat by day, and cold by night, rather than neglect his flocks (Gen. xxxi. 40). Moses will fight with odds rather than the cattle shall perish with thirst (Exod. ii.). It is only Balaam and Bedlam-Balaamites that want this mercy to their faultless beast; and it is ill falling into their hands whom the very beasts find unmerciful. (*J. Spencer.*) *Kindness to animals*:—Two ladies well known in New York were spending the summer at Newport. They were in the habit of ordering a carriage from a livery stable, and were always driven by the same coachman, a cab-driver whose name was Burns. One day Burns very suddenly pulled up his horses and turned abruptly to one side of the road. The ladies were alarmed, and, leaning out, inquired what was the matter. Burns replied that there was a little lame bird in the road, which he had very nearly run over. He was just about getting off the box to remove the little creature from its dangerous position, when one of the ladies, wishing him to remain in charge of the horses, stepped from the carriage, and picking up the bird, which was a young one, discovered its leg was broken. Her first thought was to take it home and keep it till it was quite strong again, but Burns advised her to put it on the other side of the fence on the grass, where the mother bird could find it, and nature would heal the broken leg. They decided to do this, so the bird was left in a safe place and the driver resumed his journey. The story of the kind-hearted coachman was told until it reached Mrs. John Jacob Astor, who was much touched by it, saying a man who did that little act of mercy would surely be kind to horses, and as her husband was in need of a coachman she would try to get Burns for the position. The end of the story is that Burns was duly installed as Mr. Astor's coachman. *Consideration for animals*:—I am sure that if donkeys or goats could speak they would say, "Be kind to us. We will work for you, and go as far and as fast as we can, if only you won't drive us beyond our strength, and lay those cruel sticks across our poor thin backs! Then, don't make us stand, for hours perhaps, in a burning sun without a drop of water, while you are playing marbles with your friends. You could not run about as you do now if you had no breakfast and no dinner: then how can you expect us to work hard and carry heavy children one after the other till we are ready to drop, unless you feed us properly?" (*M. Sewell.*) *Cruelty to an animal*:—I always tremble when I see a cruel boy. I feel sure he will, if he lives, grow up to be a wicked man. A brutal boy once saw his sister's two pet rabbits running about the garden. He took one up by the ears and threw it into the air. It came down on a piece of stone and lay bleeding on the ground till it died. Years after the sister visited that brother in prison, just before his execution for murder. Do you remember the bleeding rabbit, Mary?" he said, weeping; "I have been cruel ever since." (*ibid.*)

Ver. 11. He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread.—*The law of labour*:—It is no mercy to be freed from the law of labour. Nor is it God that frees a man from that law. Among the opulent there are some who break the law of labour, and some who keep it. They keep it by working in their own province, in that state of life into which it has pleased God to call them. There is brain-toil as well as hand-toil; the wear and tear of the mental energies tend more to shorten life than the ordinary labourer's wear and tear of body. Some kind of labour is enjoined upon all, by a law of God's own framing. There is division of labour, but it is a labour nevertheless. Woe to him who craves an idle life, who would slumber existence away in listless reverie! The truth of the text is forcible, whether taken literally or applied spiritually. A contrast is drawn between the industrious and the loiterer. Solomon uses the words "wise" and "foolish," and their kindred terms, in a deep spiritual sense—moral as well as mental, religious as well as intellectual. The fool is he who acts without reference to the Divine above him, and the everlasting before him. As we dare not let things take their course in our worldly business, so neither in our spiritual. Christianity is meant to hallow life in all its phases—to hallow business, labour, recreation. The Sabbath of the Christian is a life-long Sabbath, an every-day Sabbath. Bishop Taylor reminds us that the "life of every man may be so ordered that it may be a perpetual serving of God—the greatest trouble, and most busy trade, and worldly encumbrances, when they are necessary, or charitable, or profitable, being a-doing God's work. For God provides the good things of the world to serve the needs of nature, by the labours of the ploughman, the skill and pains of the artisan, and the dangers and traffic of the merchant. Idleness is called the sin of Sodom and her daughters, and indeed is the burial of a living man." The text suggests two pictures. In the one

we have the persevering husbandman, who loses no time, who works with a good heart, and at last enjoys a noble harvest. In the other we have a slothful spend-thrift, who whiles away life's sunshine by basking in it, leaving the evening to care for itself, and heedless of coming night. But it is important to remember that no earthly seed-corn will produce fruit for another world—therefore the seed-corn must be supplied from the heavenly storehouse by the heavenly husbandman—it must be indigenous to the skies, an exotic upon earth. If thou be in earnest for God, He will multiply thy seed sown, and increase the fruits of thy righteousness. (*Francis Jacor, B.A.*)

Manly industry and parasitical indolence:—I. MANLY INDUSTRY. 1. He has manly industry indicated. Agriculture is the oldest, divinest, healthiest, and most necessary branch of human industry. 2. He has manly industry rewarded. Skilled industry is seldom in want.

II. PARASITICAL INDOLENCE. 1. There are those who hang on others for their support. 2. Such persons are fools. They sacrifice self-respect. They expose themselves to degrading annoyances. (*Homilist.*) *There is great moral value in being well employed.*—The idle classes are waiting to become the vicious classes. This is vividly illustrated by the well-known story of a friendless girl who, about three generations ago, was thrown upon the world, uncared for. Her children and children's children came to number over a hundred, desperate and dangerous men and women of crime. No record of earth can tell how many a bright young man or woman thrown out of employ has become a centre of equally dark and ever-widening circles. (*Washington Gladden.*)

*The fate of drones:—*It will be profitable to idle people to observe the arrangement whereby nature condemns the drones to death in the bee community. No sooner is the business of swarming ended, and the worker-bees satisfied there will be no lack of fertile queens, when issues the terrible edict for the massacre of the drones. Poor fellows! It is to be hoped they comfort themselves with the reflection that their fate is an everlasting homily, presented by nature in dogmatical but most effective fashion, of the uselessness of all who labour not for their living. If one must die for the good of one's kind, by all means let it be as a martyr. Poor fellows! how they dart in and out, and up and down the hive, in the vain hope of escape! The workers are inexorable. (*Scientific Illustrations.*)

Ver. 12. The wicked desireth the net of evil men: but the root of the righteous yieldeth fruit.—*The crafty and the honest:—I. CRAFTINESS.* 1. Craft is an instinct of wickedness. No true Christian is a hypocrite. The better a man is, the less temptation he has to disguise himself. A wicked man must be hypocritical in proportion to his wickedness. Sin is ever cunning; wisdom alone is free. 2. Craftiness is no security against ruin. Lies are the language of craftiness. One lie leads on to another, until the man is involved in contradictions, and falls and founders.

II. HONESTY. 1. Honesty is strong in its own strength. It has a root. It lives by its own natural force and growth. 2. Honesty will extricate from difficulties. The just man may get into trouble, but by his upright principles, under God, he shall come out of them. "Honesty is the best policy." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. The wicked is snared by the transgression of his lips.—*Lies, the snare that liars are caught in:—*The Supreme has set many snares, in the constitution of things, for the detection and punishment of evil-doers. The liar's own tongue betrays him. In some of its movements, ere he is aware, it touches the spring which brings down the avenging stroke. It is instructive to read with this view the detailed account of a criminal trial. In the faltering and fall of a false witness you should see and reverence the righteousness of God. When a man is not true, the great labour of his life must be to make himself appear true; but if a man be true, he need not concern himself about appearances. He may go forward, and tread boldly; his footing is sure. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompense of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.—*Obedience to God's will and its fruits:—*Whosoever goodness is, whether it bridle our tongue, or guide our hand, or regulate our fancy, it carries its satisfaction, its recompense, along with it. Our songs of praise echo back again upon us; the works of our hands follow us, and fill us with joy; and our thoughts, if goodness raise them, are comforts. Goodness, whether in thought, word, or deed, will satisfy us, that is, fill us with joy; and nothing will satisfy us but goodness. The argument will hold *a contrario*: if that which is good satisfy us, then that which is evil cannot. **I. GOOD-**

NESS DOTH SATISFY. 1. This we cannot doubt, if we know what goodness is, and consider the nature of it, and the fountain from whence it springs. For it flows from God. It is a beam from that Eternal Light, an emanation from God Himself. The nearer goodness carrieth to the fountain of goodness, the more satisfaction it brings with it, and the fuller is our cup. Without God we cannot be happy in heaven itself, nay, without Him there could be no heaven. 2 As we draw an argument from piety, so may we draw another from the love of it. As Augustine saith, "We do not only love goodness, but even the love with which we embrace it, and delight in both." Joy and satisfaction is a resultancy from love. That which we love is also the joy of our heart. 3. If the bare opinions of piety, in those who are not yet made perfect, satisfy, though it be but for a while, then piety itself will satisfy much more. If the shadow hath this operation, what hath the substance, the thing itself! If a form of godliness, then much more godliness in its full power, will fill and satisfy us. II. NOTHING ELSE CAN SATISFY US BUT GOODNESS. It is the prerogative of goodness and piety to be alone in this work. 1. Satisfaction is but a name on earth. 2. Such is the nature and quality of the soul, that it is not fashioned nor proportioned to the things of this world. 3. God hath imprinted in the soul and in the very nature of man an "infinite and insatiable desire," which cannot be satisfied with anything that the world can present. The soul which is made capable of God, can be satisfied with nothing but God. 4. In wickedness, impiety, the licentiousness of the tongue, and the wantonness of the hands, no satisfaction can possibly be found. 5. To show how unsatisfying a thing sin is, you may behold it tormenting the wicked man, and that not only after the act, but also before and in it, first forbidding itself, then perplexing him in the act, and after gnawing the heart. Application: 1. If the fruit of our hands and lips be that alone which can satisfy us, let us then be up and doing, buckle on the armour of light, and quench every fiery dart of Satan. 2. Let us level our actions and endeavours on this, and not spend and waste ourselves on that which is not bread, and will never fill us. 3. If nothing will satisfy us but righteousness and piety, we need not consult what we are to choose here. 4. If this be the prerogative of goodness, godliness, to be alone in this work, then let her have prerogative also in our hearts, and exercise full power, and authority, and dominion over our desires. (*A. Farin-don, B.D.*) *Retributions of the lip and life*:—I. THE RETRIBUTIONS OF THE LIP. Speech, to be good, must be—1. Sincere. 2. Truthful. 3. Benevolent. How will such speech satisfy a man? (1) In its action upon his own mind. (2) In the effect he sees produced on others. (3) In the conscious approbation of God. II. THE RETRIBUTIONS OF THE LIFE. The hand here stands for the whole conduct of life. It means that man should receive the reward of his works. And this is inevitable—1. From the law of causation. 2. From the law of conscience. 3. From the law of righteousness. There is justice in the universe. (*Homilist.*) *Mischievous language*:—The language of keen irritation, reproach, invective and scorn, often inflicts wounds on the heart that are deep and hard of cure—wounds "like the piercings of a sword." This is especially the case when the words are from the lips of a friend, or of one we love, when heated by sudden passion. Wit, too, when not chastened and controlled by an amiable disposition, often wounds deeply. Jibes, jests, irony, railery, and sarcasm, fly about. No matter what the wounds, or where they be inflicted, if the wit be but shown. A happy hit, a clever, biting repartee, will not be suppressed for the sake of the feelings, or even the character, of a neighbour, or, as it may happen, of a friend. The man of wit must have his joke, cost what it may. The point may be piercing in the extreme; but if it glitters, it is enough; to the heart it will go. Such a man is feared, hated, avoided. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *The fruit of the mouth*:—The word which issues out of the lips is the greatest power in human life. Words will change the currents of life. On the use of the tongue depend the issues of a man's own life. Such fruits as a man's tongue bears, a man must eat. If his words have been good, then he shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth. The fool's lips are always coming into strife, and his mouth is always calling for stripes. His lips are the snare of his soul. An old proverb says, "A fool's tongue is always long enough to cut his own throat." 1. The tongue is a fruitful source of quarrelling and discord. A fool cannot hide his vexation, but must immediately blurt it out with the tongue, and make mischief. 2. The tongue is the instrument of lying. It is the tongue which by false witness so often condemns the innocent. 3. Closely allied to lying is flattery, which is always a mistake. 4. Another evil use of the tongue is whispering and tale-bearing. Disclosing the secret of another is a sure way of incurring

reproach and lasting infamy. 5. The tongue is sometimes employed to plot, plan, and execute mischief. 6. More pardonable vices are rashness and inopportuneness of speech. Yet these are evil enough in their way. 7. We need caution against excessive speech. There are good and beautiful uses of the tongue. It is the instrument of peace-making, of wise reproof, of the instruction of the innocent, and the championship of the distressed. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. A fool's wrath is presently known : but a prudent man covereth shame.—*Wrath as shame* :—The wise man here uses a very observable word, to express wrath. He calls it shame, for it is a shame for a man to suffer his reason to be tyrannised over by an unruly passion, which spreads deformity over his countenance, and hurries him on to expressions and actions more like those of one confined in bedlam than one who is supposed to have the use of his reason. A fool disgraces himself by giving way to the impetuous sallies of passion. He discovers his temporary madness by his pale countenance, his quivering lips, and his flashing eyes. "But a prudent man covereth shame." When he finds his passions beginning to ferment, he does not give them full scope, but considers whether he does well to be angry, and how far it is lawful and safe for him to give way to this turbulent passion. He does not cover his wrath, that it may have time to work, and draw the powers of reason into its service, that it may break forth with more effect on another occasion—but covers it, that he may have time to suppress and destroy it, by considering its folly and wickedness, by meditating on the example and grace of Christ, and by fervent supplications for the support and assistance of the spirit of meekness. By such means as these the prudent man preserves his own honour, and covers the shame of his neighbour, who is likely to be gained by gentleness and meekness. (*G. Lawson.*)

Ver. 18. The tongue of the wise is health.—*Healthy and unhealthy speech* :—Some men pride themselves on the pungency of their speech. They delight in sharp answers, keen retorts, quick repartees, and boast themselves when they cut their opponents in two. There are others who are gifted in the expression of complaint, reproach, and criticism against the whole providence of life. They can say sharp and bitter things about God and man, and they can be satisfied because of the edge of their own epigram, no matter against whom or against what that edge is directed. The tongue of the wise man is slower, but healthier; the wise man weighs his words: he is anxious to be associated only with judgments that can be confirmed by experience and illustrated by wisdom. The wise man speaks healthily—that is to say, he speaks out of the abundance of his own health, and he speaks in a way that will double and strengthen the health of others. To come near him is to ascend a mountain and breathe the freshest air of heaven, or to go down by the seashore and receive messages across the great deeps, full of vigour, and truth, and strengthening influence. Wise men keep society healthy. But for their presence it would stagnate, and go from one degree of corruption to another until it became wholly pestilential. There are two speakers in the text, to the end of time there will probably be two speakers in the world—the critical speaker and the judicial speaker; the man all sharpness and the man all thankfulness. The business of Christian discipline is to tame the tongue, to chasten it, to teach it the speech of wisdom, and to instruct it as to the right time of utterance and the right time of silence. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. The lip of truth shall be established for ever.—*Truthfulness* :—I. THE RIGHTeousNESS OF TRUTH (ver. 17). The highest and only proper use of speech is to show the right. It may be used to set forth—1. Right views of God (Psa. xl. 9; John xvii. 25, 26; Rom. iii. 21, 22). 2. Right views of personal experience (Psa. lxxvi. 16). 3. Right estimates of character. Testimonials should be given with great caution. 4. Right statements as to the value of articles of merchandise. 5. Right expositions of Scripture. Some "wrest" the Scriptures (2 Pet. iii. 16); others make them void by their traditions (Mark vii. 13); others handle them deceitfully (2 Cor. iv. 2); but the God-taught expositor aims at "the manifestation of the truth." II. THE WHOLESOMENESS OF TRUTH (ver. 18). Foolish speech often wounds, but in the word of wisdom is healing. Healthy doctrine produces healthy living, and thus it becomes its own advocate. III. THE STABILITY OF TRUTH (ver. 19). "Truth, like cork, will be uppermost one time or other, though an effort be made to keep it under water." Time is on the side of truth, and so is eternity.

There has been an abundant establishment of—1. The testimony of prophets. 2. Words spoken by the opponents of error. Lies often die hard, but sooner or later they die surely. IV. THE SAFETY OF TRUTH. We may be afraid to be wrong, but should never be afraid to be right. V. THE REWARD OF TRUTH (ver. 22.) (*H. Thorne.*) *The lip of truth* :—There was once a little boy named Duncan. The boys used to call him “True Duncan” because he would never tell a lie. One day he was playing with an axe in the schoolyard. The axe was used for cutting wood for the schoolroom fire in winter. While Duncan was chopping a stick, the teacher’s cat, “Old Tabby,” came and leaped on to the log of wood where Duncan was at work. He had raised the axe to cut the wood, but it fell on the cat and killed her. What to do he knew not. She was the master’s pet cat, and used to sit on a cushion at his side while he was hearing the boys’ lessons. Duncan stood looking at poor Tabby. His face grew red and the tears stood in his eyes. All the boys came running up, and every one had something to say. One of them was heard whispering to the others, “Now, boys, let us see if Duncan can’t make up a fib as well as the rest of us.” “Not he,” said Tom Brown, who was Duncan’s friend, “not he, I’ll warrant. Duncan will be as true as gold.” John Jones stepped up and said, “Come, boys, let us fling the cat into the lane, and we can tell Mr. Cole that the butcher’s dog killed her. You know that he worried her last week.” Some of them thought that would do very well. But Duncan looked quite angry; his cheek swelled and his face grew redder than before. “No, no,” said he. “Do you think I would say that? It would be a lie—a lie!” Each time he used the word his voice grew louder. Then he took up the poor thing and carried her into the master’s room. The boys followed to see what would happen. The master looked up and said, “What? is this my poor Tabby killed? Who could have done me such an injury?” All were silent for a little while. As soon as Duncan could get his voice he said, “Mr. Cole, I am very sorry I killed poor Tabby. Indeed, sir, I am very sorry, I ought to have been more careful, for I saw her rubbing herself against the log. I am more sorry than I can tell, sir.” Every one expected to see Mr. Cole get very angry, take down his cane and give Duncan a sound thrashing. But instead of that he put on a pleasant smile and said, “Duncan, you are a brave boy. I saw and heard all that passed in the yard from my window above. I am glad to see such an example of truth and honour in my school.” Duncan took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. The boys could not keep silence any longer, and when Tom Brown cried, “Three cheers for True Duncan!” they all joined and made the schoolhouse ring with a mighty hurrah. The teacher then said, “My boys, I am glad you know what is right and that you approve it, though I am afraid some of you could not have done it. Learn from this time that nothing can make a lie necessary. Suppose Duncan had taken your evil advice and come to me with a lie, it would have been instantly detected, and instead of the honour of truth he would have had only the shame of falsehood.” (*Sunday School.*) **But a lying tongue is but for a moment.**—*The doomed life of a lie* :—It is “but for a moment.” Dean Swift complains that the influence of a lie is often mischievously lasting; so often does it happen that if a lie be believed, only for an hour, it has done its work, and there is no further occasion for it. But the inherent mortality of whatever is false is recognised in other proverbs than those of Solomon, *e.g.*, the English proverb, “A lie has no legs.” “A lie, in that it is a lie, always carries within itself the germs of its own dissolution. It is sure to destroy itself at last.” Carlyle says, “There is no lie in the long run successful. The hour of all windbags does arrive; every windbag is at length ripped, and collapses.” “Lies exist only to be extinguished; they wait and cry earnestly for extinction.” “Ruin is the great sea of darkness whither all falsehoods, winding or direct, continually flow.” “Nothing,” affirms a political philosopher, of an earlier and quite another school, “can give stability and durable uniformity to error. Indolence or ignorance may keep it floating, as it were, on the surface of the mind, and sometimes hinder truth from penetrating; or force may maintain it in possession, while the mind assents to it no longer. But such opinions, like human bodies, tend to dissolution from their birth. . . . Men are dragged into them, and held down in them, by chains of circumstances. Break but these chains, and the mind returns with a kind of intellectual elasticity to its proper object—truth.” (*Francis Jacox, B.A.*) *Skill in telling lies* :—The lying tongue succeeds indeed, but its success is momentary; it flashes and expires; it has a clear, straightforward story to tell, but events come, and cross-examine that story, and set it in proper distance and perspective; alliances to which the story owed its consistency are broken up,

and evil men begin to divulge secrets regarding one another; piece by piece the story falls asunder, and at the end it is found that it was the fabrication of a malignant genius. Be sure you are true yourselves, and have a true purpose in view, and all discrepancies, inconsistencies, and difficulties will ultimately be smoothed down, and men will be brought to acknowledge the integrity of your heart. Be as skilful as you please in the way of telling lies, arrange everything with consummate cunning, hire all your allies, bribe your spies, and make your way clear by abundance of gold, and yet in the long run your confederates will turn against you, and they to whom you have given most money will be glad to expose your cupidity and falsehood. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Truth more enduring than falsehood*:—Truth wears well. Time tests it, but it right well endures the trial. If, then, I have spoken the truth, and have for the present to suffer for it, I must be content to wait. If also I believe the truth of God, and endeavour to declare it, I may meet with much opposition, but I need not fear, for ultimately the truth must prevail. What a poor thing is the temporary triumph of falsehood! "A lying lip is but for a moment!" It is a mere gourd, which comes up in a night, and perishes in a night; and the greater its development, the more manifest its decay. On the other hand, how worthy of an immortal being is the avowal and defence of that truth which can never change; the everlasting gospel, which is established in the immutable truth of an unchanging God! An old proverb says, "He that speaks truth shames the devil." Assuredly he that speaks the truth of God will put to shame all the devils in hell, and confound all the seed of the serpent which now hiss out their falsehoods. Oh, my heart, take care that thou be in all things on the side of truth, both in small things and great; but specially on the side of Him by whom grace and truth have come among men! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 20. Deceit is in the heart of them that imagine evil.—A denunciation of wicked men.—I. A DESCRIPTION OF THEIR PERSONS. 1. They are evil-doers, but more especially, the practiser, the artificer in evil; one wholly bent upon sin; the body and mind occupied in executing and acting corrupt desires. 2. Nor is every evil aimed at, but evil in a high degree, evil against others—mischief. 3. This man is subtle in his evil. He is a cunning workman, sly, subtle, and close devising and effecting his mischief. Like a witty handicraftsman, he is most silent when he is most upon his inventions. It is a sign of an extreme wicked man, to be an inventor of evil, a plotter and deviser of mischief. As a coney-catcher lives by his wits, so sin and sinners by their wiles. But whence this? (1) Satan at first transformed himself into an angel of light; then no marvel if his ministers do so. (2) They seem just, religious, peaceable, and honest men, knowing that the less they be suspected, the more successful their plots are likely to be. (3) Never was any mischief more mischievous than that which is veiled with good pretences of peace or religion. II. THE CONDITION OF THESE PERSONS. Their deceit returns into the heart that first hatched it, *i.e.*, brings certain woe and unavoidable mischief on themselves, to the breaking of their own hearts. Whence note, that the greatest workers of sin and mischief are greatest workers of their own woe. 1. There is no small heaviness and unquietness in the heart while it is plotting and hammering evil. 2. Whomsoever they deceive, they cannot deceive God, who will make them the greatest deceivers of themselves. 3. How just it is, that what pleasure they conceive in inventing mischief, they should lose it by the fruit of their mischievous inventions. 4. Sin is a sure paymaster, and her wages are death. 5. The sorrow of their sin comes with much and daily addition, and pierces the man's heart as a sword. Beware of devising mischief against the Church of God, His servants and holy religion. Consider hereunto—(1) The power of God, which all wicked men together are not able to resist. (2) The wisdom of God, who hath seven eyes, and all upon the Church for good. (3) The justice of God, with whom it is righteous that wicked men in devising mischief should provide their own rods. (4) Evil men lay all their plots on a sandy and slippery foundation, which will bring down all the house and frame on their own heads. Let not good men be disquieted at any such plots, which shall all redound upon their enemies themselves. (*T. Taylor.*) *Self-deceit*.—The word rendered "deceit" may be understood as including deceit practised on a man's self as well as on others, and here it may have the sense of self-deceit. Eminent translators have rendered the word, in its present connection, disappointment; frustrated hope. Those who "imagine evil" dare not avow their designs. Dissimulation and craft are productive of incessant apprehension

and anxiety. They necessarily engender self-dissatisfaction and tremor, and that from the very dread of detection, frustration, and consequent evil to themselves, instead of to those against whom they were plotting. (*R. Wardlaw.*)

Ver. 21. There shall no evil happen to the just.—*The security of the faithful*:—The things which distinguish us most try us most. Those attributes of our nature which serve to mark its superiority, serve also to evince its liability to trouble. The animal tribes, as they have no capacity for reviewing the past, so have they no power of anticipating the future. And hence they have no dread, in the strict sense, of coming evils. But we can look forward. We can busy ourselves in thought and imagination with days to come. Yet the heavier half of the cares and anxieties that we have to bear are connected with this faculty. The afflictions we fear often distress us more than the afflictions we lie under. But God, who gave us our being, knows this, and has provided against it in His Word. Does not this text meet our whole case? Amidst all disasters the good may be confident and calm. What is the significance of this assurance? It cannot be taken literally. Evil in the sense of earthly calamity, sorrow and trial is the lot of all. What, then, does the text mean? Things which are evil in themselves do not, as such, fall upon the people of God. For them the curse is turned into a blessing. A divine process of transmutation takes place in the case of every ill that befalls a child of God, and the ill becomes a good. Illustrate this—1. From cases of personal affliction of mind, or of body, or of both. 2. Adverse circumstances. 3. Bereavements. This subject teaches the goodness of Divine providence; and it tranquillizes us under present trials. (*C. M. Merry.*) *No evil to the just*:—The word “just” was a term used anciently in connection with the chase, and meant the equal dividing of the prey procured by hunting among those that took part in the pursuit. It means to do right, to try to be harmless. Though the just man sometimes come short of the mark, his prevailing disposition and aim are to be and to do right. He is studious to do right. To such a man, it is declared, no evil shall happen. How are we to understand this? 1. Whatever evil comes to a just man cannot happen in the sense of coming by chance. There is a government of God over the affairs of men, and therefore nothing takes place by accident or chance. No evil can come to the just man that does not come designedly, or permissively, in the course of providence. 2. To a just man no evil can come that is not controlled and overruled for his good. “All things work together for good to them that love God.” 3. This is true in relation to helping others, as well as himself. Those who have suffered themselves are the better prepared to sympathize with and help their fellow-creatures that suffer. 4. No permanent evil can come to a just man. Then—(1) Let us thank God for pains and afflictions. (2) We should understand that, if we try to be just, we shall have our reward now and hereafter. There can be no failure or mistake. (*H. M. Gallaher, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. Lying lips are abomination to the Lord.—*On lying*:—Man excels the rest of the creatures in the power of communicating thoughts one to another. The creatures are taught, by nature, almost immediately, how to supply their wants. But we are purposely formed to need and to give help in everything, through the whole of our days; and therefore some ready and extensive method of signifying mutually whatever passes within our minds was peculiarly necessary for us. Without this no person would have more knowledge of anything than he could attain of himself. The pleasure and benefits of society would be reduced to a narrow compass, and life hang upon our hands joyless and uncomfortable. Articulate speech, our more distinguishing property, is our chief medium of intercourse. As every blessing may be fatally misused, so there is hardly any bad purpose which language may not be made to serve. It can be turned from its original design of giving right information to those with whom we converse to the opposite one of leading them wrong. **I. WHAT THINGS ARE TO BE REPUTED LIES AND WHAT NOT.** 1. Since actions and gestures, as well as words, may be employed to express what we think, they may also be employed to express what we do not think, which is the essence of a lie. Some of our actions are naturally significative. But we have never consented to make our actions in general signs of our intentions, as we have our words. If persons interpret our actions they may deceive them not. Such actions as have no determinate sense appropriated to them by agreement, explicit or implied, can be no violations of sincerity; but such as have are subject to just the same rules with words; and we may be guilty of as gross falsehoods in

the former as in the latter. 2. Words having acquired their significations by the mutual acquiescence of mankind may change them by the same method. Illustrate by words "humble" and "servant." The high-strained expressions of civility which are so common, however innocent now, proceeded originally from a mean and fawning and fallacious disposition in those who began them, and tended to nurse up vanity and haughtiness in those to whom they were addressed. As for phrases, of which custom hath changed or annihilated the signification, though, after this is done, they are no longer lies, yet they were lies all the time it was doing; and every new step taken in the same road will be a new lie till everybody finds it out and learns the fashionable interpretation of it. Great care must therefore be taken to prevent our "language running into a lie." 3. As to all figures of speech, fables, allegories, feigned histories, and parables, those for instance of our blessed Saviour, and others in Scripture, intended only to convey instruction more agreeably or efficaciously, there is evidently no room to condemn these as deceits. But the case is widely different when persons, with all the marks of seriousness, affirm what they will afterwards despise and ridicule others for believing. These are plainly designed falsehoods, and in a greater or less degree, injurious ones. This is "foolish talking, and jesting not convenient." 4. Concerning ambiguous phrases, which in one acceptation express our meaning truly, but in another do not, it must be observed that when we are bound, by promise or otherwise, to declare what we know or believe in any case, we are bound to declare it in such terms as are likely to be well understood. And even when we are not thus bound we should speak of things, if we can safely, with plainness and simplicity. There may be reason for reservedness towards some persons, even in trifles. When silence will not conceal a thing which ought to be concealed, it must be allowable to speak upon the subject in such a manner as to leave that part in obscurity which is not fit to be revealed. When we design only to keep a man ignorant of a fact it is his own fault if he will also believe a fancy. But if we go further, and lay snares for him; if we give assurances which, in their obvious and universal acceptation, are false, but only have a latent forced construction, in which, after all, they just may be true, this is equivocation, and cannot be defended. II. THE PLEAS WHICH ARE URGED TO JUSTIFY SOME SORTS OF DIRECT LYING. Some say that speech was given to mankind solely for their common benefit; nor consequently is it ever used amiss when it contributes to that end. This opinion they try to confirm by several instances of falsehoods which good persons are recorded in Scripture to have uttered knowingly. But some actions may be praised in holy writ on the whole without the least intention of approving the circumstances of insincerity, or other imperfections, with which they were accompanied. Others say that because of our mutual relation we ought to consult our mutual advantage; and where adhering to truth will not promote this, falsehood may be justly substituted. But we feel a natural reluctance in our consciences to lying and deceiving, as such, without looking forward to consequences. What are those instances in which, on balancing the two sides of the account, violation of truth is more beneficial than detrimental to mankind? But what can be said in relation to cases of peril to property or life? Is falsehood then justifiable? The only answer is that the cases are rare, and extreme, and even then doubtfully wise. Better suffer than lie. Take the case of the sick. Prevarication is sometimes even necessary. It must be owned that, in many of the above-mentioned cases there are sometimes difficulties, with which we have much more cause to pray God that we may never be tried than to be confident that we shall judge and act rightly if we are. But the arguments, were they ever so specious, for the lawfulness of fraud in seemingly harmless cases, can never prove it lawful in others of a nature quite contrary. The extreme danger of men's proceeding in falsehood to very pernicious lengths, if once they begin, is a most unanswerable objection against its being permitted in any degree at all. (*Abp. Secker.*) *Lying*:—It is possible to speak against truth and yet not lie, provided we speak in good faith. It is speaking in bad faith, with conscious purpose of deceiving, that is a lie. Take the text on the broad general ground that lying is abomination to the Lord. Take the word in its honest downright form; do not let us shelter ourselves under smooth expressions—equivocation, prevarication, dissembling, simulation, untruthfulness—longer words, by which men try to take the edge from unpleasant facts—but which all in the end point to the same thing, a want of sincerity. Whatever you may do to soften off the epithet and description, there remains the text in all its decision and boldness. Nor is the verdict of man less decisive. Even while they practise it men condemn lying. Perjury is a crime branded by all

governments, heathen as well as Christian. We apply the word "true" to all that is good and worthy. Is not our instinctive feeling that truth is the object most worthy of attaining? Its opposite must be proportionally odious. Consider the mischief which lying occasions to society. It is by mutual confidence, by faith in the honesty and purity of each other's motives, that we live on together. No peace can be where there is no trust. See some of the sorts of lies which prevail nowadays. 1. White lies—lies glossed over and decorated by fashion; specious habits of talk, and conventional phrases; justified by necessity, expediency, or the like. 2. Slander. This is not peculiar to our age—witness the cases of Mephibosheth, Naboth, Jeremiah, the blessed Lord Himself, all victims of false accusation—but it is not rare in our age. 3. Lies to screen our faults. These are more natural and intelligible. To escape the consequences of a sin by hiding it seems a tangible advantage; but is it? Do we gain by cloaking one fault with another? Every right-minded man would have a thousand times more pity for one who owned his fault and asked forgiveness than for one who tried to elude detection. We are disgusted with the man who has no self-respect, and no respect for us, who in using a lie deems us simple enough to be cajoled, and considers the doubling of his sin preferable to owning himself in the wrong. This is said of sins against our fellow-men: how much more forcibly it applies to sins against God. 4. Two other modes of lying frequently come before the clergyman. (1) In asking for relief there are those who simulate and exaggerate their poverty to move the hearts of the charitable. (2) In the publication of the banns of marriage, false addresses are frequently given, and that with an assurance perfectly startling. Then let us see to the truthfulness of our hearts and lips. If we are the children of God, members of Christ, temples of the Holy Ghost, we must be truthful. If you are tempted to utter words of deceit, remember how abominable such things are to the Lord, and how they bar up impenetrably the gates of heaven, which fly open at the approach of truth. (*G. F. Prescott, M.A.*) *The nature, malignity, and pernicious effects of falsehood and lying* :—Nothing in nature is so universally decried, and yet so universally practised, as falsehood. A mighty, governing lie goes round the world, and has almost banished truth out of it. The greatest annoyance and disturbance of mankind has been from one of these two things, force or fraud; and force often allies with fraud. It is the tongue that drives the world before it. It is hard to assign any one thing but lying, which God and man so unanimously join in the hatred of; and it is hard to tell whether it does a greater dishonour to God, or mischief to man. I. THE NATURE OF A LIE, AND THE PROPER ESSENTIAL MALIGNITY OF ALL FALSEHOOD. A lie is an outward signification of something contrary to, or at least beside the inward sense of the mind. It is a false signification, knowingly and voluntarily used. There are said to be three different kinds of lie. 1. The pernicious lie, uttered for the hurt or disadvantage of our neighbour. 2. The officious lie, uttered for our own, or our neighbour's advantage. 3. The ludicrous and jocose lie, uttered by way of jest, and only for mirth's sake, in common converse. The unlawfulness of lying is grounded upon this, that a lie is properly a sort of species of injustice, and a violation of the right of that person to whom the false speech is directed. II. THE PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF LYING. 1. It was this introduced sin into the world; and by lying sin is still propagated and promoted. 2. To it is due all the misery and calamity that befalls mankind. That which brought sin into the world necessarily brings with it sorrow. 3. Lying tends utterly to dissolve society. The band that knits together and supports all compacts is truth and faithfulness. Without mutual trust there could not only be no happiness, but indeed no living in this world. 4. Deceit and falsehood most peculiarly indispose the hearts of men to the impressions of religion. The very life and soul of all religion is sincerity. III. THE REWARDS OR PUNISHMENTS that will assuredly attend, or at least follow, this base practice. (1) An utter loss of all credit and belief with sober and discreet persons. (2) The hatred of all those whom the liar either has, or would, deceive. (3) A final separation from God, who is truth itself. (*R. South, D.D.*) *The Bible warning against lying* :—Three reasons why we ought to mind this warning. I. BECAUSE OF WHAT GOD THINKS ABOUT IT. There is hardly any form of wickedness against which God has spoken so often and so strongly in the Bible as He has against lying. To know what God thinks about lying should lead us to mind the warning against it. II. BECAUSE OF WHAT MEN THINK OF IT. Somebody asked Aristotle what a man could gain by lying. His answer was "that no one will believe him when he speaks the truth." III. BECAUSE OF THE PUNISHMENT WHICH MUST FOLLOW LYING

AFTER DEATH. Whatever the effect of our lying in this life may be, it will soon be over. The consequences must follow us after death. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *School-boy honour*.—There can be no question that men and women would be far better than they are if they had been better brought up. If men and women were themselves better, they would give their children a higher moral training. I feel bound to bring forward a definite charge of neglect of parental and tutorial duty against parents and teachers in general. The charge is this: Parents and teachers too often either connive at, or openly encourage, what is called, in unconscious irony, "school-boy honour." What can be said in favour of those sentiments out of which "school-boy honour" springs? 1. There is something inexpressibly petty and mean in tale-bearing; in the habit of running to a parent or master with every little complaint of personal injury or wrong inflicted. It is good for the young to learn to bear small wrongs and pains from each other, and to learn also how to settle their own quarrels. 2. There is something mean and cowardly in reporting on the sly the offences committed by others. This is bad for the informer, who grows into conceit and priggishness. The sly informer, the whisperer, is really a traitor. He plays and consorts on equal terms with the rest, who are altogether unconscious that they have a spy among them. Any one whose sense of duty leads him to "tell" must have the moral courage to warn the offender previously, to make his charge publicly, and to be willing to bear all the consequences of his conscientious act. 3. School-boy honour may represent the noble sentiments of brotherhood and comradeship. Under existing circumstances, the caste, or class-feeling, or clanship among boys, demands some principle of mutual loyalty and defence. Boys ought, within certain limits, to stand by each other. I give all the praise it deserves to school-boy honour. But in its practical working, and in the extremes to which mutual protection is carried, it is full of evil, corrupting to the morals, and tending to obliterate the fine sense of right and wrong which is often native to the boy's mind. (1) This code of honour requires or enjoins deceit and falsehood. Boys may not lie to one another, but it is a recognised principle that they may lie to their masters. (2) The code as generally maintained is not only not favourable to morality, but directly and falsely subversive of it. Its main use is to shelter culprits and wrong-doers, and mainly for offences distinctly and grievously immoral, such as lying and brutality, and even worse things than these. When boys are fully aware of an immoral and vicious habit prevailing amongst them, and when they know it cannot be put down by themselves, it should be a real point of honour with them first to protest against it as unworthy even of boys, then to threaten to report a repetition of the offence openly and courageously to those authorities who may know how to deal with it. There should be no sly tale-bearing. (*C. Voysey.*)

Ver. 23. A prudent man concealeth knowledge.—*Concealing knowledge*.—**I. WHEN IT IS OPPORTUNE** (*John xvi. 12.*) **II. WHEN IT IS ABOVE THE CAPACITY OF HIS HEARERS** (*1 Cor. ii. 2.*) **III. WHEN LIKELY TO BE MISAPPLIED** (*Mark xv. 5.*) **IV. WHEN SURE OF REJECTION** (*Matt. vii. 6.*) **V. WHEN CALCULATED TO INJURE THE BRETHREN** (*Lev. xix. 16.*) **WHEN TO UTTER IT WOULD BE ONLY FOR SELF-DISPLAY** (*chap. xxvii. 2.*) (*R. A. Griffin.*)

Ver. 24. The hand of the diligent shall bear rule.—*The reward of the diligent*.—The natural estate of man is labour. Toil was the requirement of paradise. God's Word recognises the universal law of work. "Toil is prayer"; and the Christian learns from the record of God's will that honest, faithful, diligent, God-fearing and God-honouring work is itself a worship acceptable to the great All-worker. God enjoins diligence upon us by precept and by example. About us, all things perform their allotment of work, and do it promptly and without a thought of delay. God teaches men by His own ceaseless workings through ten thousand ever-busy forces, and revelation utters the same bidding to unremitting toil. For labour is the tenure of God's gifts to man. It is thus the requirement of Christian duty that we should not be slothful in business. Promises of reward cluster around the fulfilment of this command. Diligent hands are speedily rendered expert. The diligent hand teaches and trains the wary and observing eye. God works no miracles on behalf of the drones of society. And the hand of the diligent shall bear rule, as Joseph the faithful slave-boy found, and Daniel the captive Hebrew boy. Another reward of the diligent is honour and renown. "He shall stand before kings." Illustrate by the cases of Benjamin Franklin and

William Carey. Learn that sloth and idleness are expressly forbidden; and so is that undue and overwrought exertion which marks the man greedy of gain. Riches are to be valued as means, not as an end. (*Bp. Stevens Perry.*) *The hand of the diligent shall bear rule*:—A young man in a leather store used to feel very impatient with his employer for keeping him year after year, for three years, "handling hides." But he saw the use of it in his future career, when, in an establishment of his own, he was able to tell by the touch the exact quality of the goods. It was only by the thousands of repetitions that the lesson was learned; and so it is with everything in which we acquire skill. The half-informed, half-skilled in every business outnumber the others, dozens to one. Daniel Webster once replied to a young man who asked him if there was "any room in the legal profession," "There is always room at the top." The better you know your business the more you are likely to rise. You can gather much information by making a wise use of your eyes and ears, and perhaps be able to surprise your employer in an emergency by stepping into the "next man's" place and discharging his duties satisfactorily. So, learn your business, and you will find there is "room at the top." (*Home Words.*) *Diligence and its reward*:—Mr. Chauncey M. Depew tells the story of his visit to the mechanical department of Cornell University. He found at the head of it Professor Morris, who claimed him as a superior officer, giving as a reason that he was an old-time worker on the New York Central Railway. "How did you get here?" asked Depew. "I was stoker on the New York Central. I stood on the footboard as an engineer on the Central. While a locomotive engineer I made up my mind to get an education. I studied at night, and fitted myself for Union College, running all the time with my locomotive. I procured books, and attended, as far as possible, all lectures and recitations. I kept up with my class, and on the day of graduation I left my locomotive, washed up, put on the gown and cap, delivered my thesis, and received my diplomas, put the gown and cap in the closet, put on my working shirt, got on my engine, and made my usual run that day." "Then," says Depew, "I knew how he became Professor Morris." That spirit will cause a man to rise anywhere and in any calling.

Ver. 25. *Heaviness in the heart of man maketh it stoop: but a good word maketh it glad.*—*The saddening and the succouring*:—I. THE SADDENING IN LIFE. There is a soul-crushing sadness here. 1. Personal affliction that maketh the heart stoop. 2. Social affliction that maketh the heart stoop. II. THE SUCCOURING IN LIFE. "A good word maketh it glad." 1. What are good words? (1) True words; (2) kind words; (3) suitable words. 2. Where are good words? The gospel is that word. Words about providence, about pardon, about resurrection. Words to comfort us in all our tribulations. (*Urijah R. Thomas.*) *The sin of brooding*:—There is a necessity that we should be in heaviness through manifold temptations; but we must beware lest by giving free scope to anxious and melancholy thoughts, our hearts should sink in us like a stone, and our souls become altogether unfit to relish the comforts or perform the services of life. Sadness of the countenance makes the heart better, but despondency of heart disqualifies men for thanking and praising God, for serving their generation, and for bearing the burdens of life. Life itself becomes burdensome, and is often shortened, by excessive grief. There is nothing that claims our grief so much as sin, and yet there may be an excess of sorrow for sin which exposes men to the devil, and drives them into his arms. Are you grieved in your minds? Remember that it is sinful and dangerous to brood perpetually over your sorrows. (*G. Lawson.*) *A cheering word*:—The celebrated Dr. R. W. Dale, of Birmingham, used to be fond of relating how he was cheered once by a poor woman's earnest words. He was feeling dejected and as if all his strength was gone, when, passing through a street in Birmingham, he met a decently dressed stranger, laden with parcels, who stopped and said, "God bless you, Dr. Dale!" Her face was unknown to him, and he answered, "Thank you. What is your name?" "Never mind my name," was the response; "but if you only knew how you have made me feel hundreds of times, and what a happy home you have given me! God bless you!" Then she was lost in the crowd, but she had encouraged a man whose books are in every library, and whose name is dear to the universal Church. (*Sunday Companion.*)

Ver. 26. *The righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.*—*The religious man's advantages*:—The sentiments of men concerning virtue, and their own

particular practice, form a very strange and striking contrast. Philosophers have differed about the origin of moral distinctions, and delivered various theories concerning virtue; but the people who judge from their feelings have no system but one. Religion gives its powerful sanction to the maxims of morality. The objections against a holy life have proceeded on maxims directly contrary to the text. The inducements to vice, which have been powerful in all ages, are the same that were presented by the tempter to our first parents—the attractions of ambition and the allurements of pleasure. The righteous man is wiser than his neighbour. There is no part of his nature in which man is so earnest to excel, and so jealous of a defect, as his understanding. And no wonder, for it is his prerogative and his glory. This enters into the foundation of character; for without intellectual abilities moral qualities cannot subsist, and a good heart will go wrong without the guidance of a good understanding. Where, then, is wisdom to be found? If you will trust the dictates of religion and reason, to be virtuous is to be wise. The testimony of all who have gone before you confirms the decision. In opposition, however, to the voice of religion, of reason, and of mankind, there are multitudes in every age who reckon themselves more excellent than their neighbours, by trespassing against the laws which all ages have counted sacred, the younger by the pursuit of criminal gratification, the old by habits of deceit and fraud. The early period of life is frequently a season of delusion. There is no moderation nor government in vice. Guilty pleasures become the masters and tyrants of the mind; when these lords acquire dominion, they bring all the thoughts into captivity, and rule with unlimited and despotic sway. When it is seen that the righteous man is wiser and greater and happier than his neighbour, the objections against religion are removed, the ways of Providence are vindicated, and virtue is established upon an everlasting foundation. (*John Logan.*) *The prospects of the righteous* :—The word rendered “excellent” is on the margin translated “abundant.” Although it is a truth that in regard to “character,” in all its principles and their practical results, “the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour,” yet such statement is almost a truism. Taking the word as referring to possessions and prospects, as meaning that the righteous excels his neighbour, or men in general around him, in his lot as to happiness and hope—blessings in enjoyment and blessings in anticipation—it then becomes a statement of great importance. It presents an inducement to the godly to “hold fast their profession,” and an inducement to others to join their society. Even the poorest of the people of God has a lot that may well be envied by the wealthiest and the noblest of the sons of earth. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *The advantages of virtue to civil society* :—By the “righteous” is intended the religious man, one who fears God and eschews evil. By his “neighbour” is meant a man of contrary character, one who careth not for God, but pursues the interests or pleasures of the world, without any regard to His authority. The “excellency” ascribed may refer either to the personal happiness attending it, or its beneficial influence on society. A man of religion and virtue is a more useful, and consequently a more valuable member of a community than his wicked neighbour. I. THE NECESSITY OF VIRTUE AND RELIGION TO THE ENDS OF CIVIL SOCIETY. In contradiction it has been urged that vice is a thing highly beneficial to society, confers on it so many advantages, that public happiness would be imperfect without it. We may admit, in support of this paradox, that if there were no vicious men in the world, we should not want to be protected by civil government from them. We may also admit, that some advantages arise to society from the vices of men, either as they occasion good laws or awaken a due execution of them, or as the example or nature of his punishment may render a criminal of some service to the public. But these are the purely accidental consequences from vice. Its natural and proper effects are all evil, the very evils which government was designed to redress. The advantages that arise from it are owing wholly to the wisdom and virtue of those in authority. The experience of all history affirms to us that the peace, strength, and happiness of a society depend on the justice and fidelity, the temperance and charity of its members; that these virtues always render a people flourishing and secure, and the contrary vices are as constantly productive of misery and ruin. If these virtues are acknowledged necessary to social felicity, religion must be so too, because no other principle can offer an equal inducement to the practice of them, or equally restrain men from the opposite vices. Fear cannot effectually govern the actions of men, nor the fantastic principle called honour. If by honour is meant anything distinct from conscience, it is no more than a regard to the censure

and esteem of the world. II. How VIRTUE AND RELIGION FIT AND DISPOSE MEN FOR THE MOST USEFUL DISCHARGE OF THE SEVERAL OFFICES AND RELATIONS OF SOCIAL LIFE. Power, without goodness, is the most terrible idea our imagination can form; and the more the authority of any station in society is extended, the more it concerns public happiness that it be committed to men fearing God. Parts, knowledge, and experience, are indeed excellent ingredients in a public character, of equal use and ornament to the seat of judgment and council, but without religion and virtue, these are only abilities to do mischief. All that skill which deserves the name of wisdom, religion approves, recommends, and teaches. More true political wisdom can be learned from the Holy Scriptures, and even from this single book of Proverbs, than from a thousand such writers as Machiavel. Religion and virtue are proportionally conducive to happiness in every inferior relation of life. They equally dispose men to be good rulers and good subjects, good parents and good children, good masters and good servants, good neighbours and good friends. Wherever a religion is true and sincere, justice, meekness, and fidelity, all the virtues that can render a government secure, and a people happy, will be the fruits of it. III. A RELIGIOUS MOTIVE TO VALUE AND ESTEEM PERSONS OF THIS EXCELLENT CHARACTER, BECAUSE BY THEIR PIETY AND PRAYERS THE BLESSING OF GOD IS DERIVED ON THE COMMUNITY. Righteous men ought to be esteemed a strength and defence to their country, and wicked men a reproach and weakness. The declarations of God and the histories of His providence, show that the piety of good men more effectually prevails for His blessing upon a nation than the sins of wicked men provoke His resentment. Since we all pretend a concern for the prosperity of our country, let our zeal for it appear in our endeavours to promote virtue and religion. Let us constantly distinguish the righteous by that honour and respect which is due to so excellent a character. Above all, let our care begin at home; let us each in our stations govern our lives by the rules of our holy religion, and practise those virtues ourselves whose excellence we acknowledge in others. (*J. Rogers, D.D.*) *The excellency of religion*.—Virtue and religion are excellent things in themselves, and they improve and adorn and exalt our natures. The last sentence of the text suggests this—that though righteousness and piety and religion are excellent things, so that men can hardly avoid seeing the beauty and loveliness of them, yet the deceitfulness of sin will be apt to deliver them, and find out some pretence or excuse to carry men against their best reason, and what they know is fittest to be done. The excellency of a religious life above a life of sin and wickedness, may be made out from the following considerations: I. THAT GOD HIMSELF HAS PUT A GREAT MANY MARKS OF HONOUR UPON RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GOODNESS. That person or that thing must be honourable which God is pleased to honour, and that must be despicable which He despises. He who fears God, and does his duty, is the servant of God and the friend of God. Good men are in an especial manner partakers of the Divine nature; their souls are honoured and blessed with the communion of God, and their bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost. II. WE HAVE ALSO THE JUDGMENT OF ALL MANKIND, NOT ONLY OF THE GOOD AND VIRTUOUS, BUT OF THE GREATEST PART EVEN OF WICKED MEN. 1. Almost all nations, in all ages of the world, however they may have differed as to the measures of some virtues and vices, yet have agreed as to the main and great points of duty; which I can impute to nothing else but the natural beauty and excellence of virtue, and the deformity of vice. 2. When men will to serve any interest or appetite, they generally endeavour to conceal it, are unwilling to have it known, and think it for their honour to disguise the matter as much as they can. “Hypocrisy is a homage that vice pays to virtue.” And vice, though disguised and concealed from the world, is so ugly a thing, that few people can bear the sense of it themselves, so they find out some colour or excuse with which to deceive themselves. 3. When bad men cannot cover their shame either from the world or themselves, they set about endeavouring to blacken the rest of the world; which is another sort of homage men pay to virtue. 4. Though men will indulge their own appetites, they desire their children and relations, and those whom they love, to be virtuous and good. III. RELIGION TENDS TO MAKE OUR MINDS FREE AND EASY, TO GIVE US CONFIDENCE TOWARDS GOD, AND PEACE IN OUR OWN BREASTS. It sets our souls at liberty from the tyranny of hurtful lusts and passions, and it fills us with joy and good hope in every condition of life. Religion, thoroughly imbibed, has a direct natural tendency to procure all these blessings for us; whereas vice and wickedness both corrupt and enslave our minds. When a man ventures to break the commands of God, he is generally plunged by it into abundance of

troubles and perplexities. IV. PIETY AND VIRTUE MAKE EVERYTHING ELSE GOOD, AND OF GOOD USE, WHICH A MAN HAS, OR THAT HAPPENS TO HIM, WHEREAS SIN AND WICKEDNESS TEND TO CORRUPT AND SPOIL EVERYTHING. There is no condition but what to a good man may serve to very good ends and purposes, whether a man be high or low in the world. If he be in affliction, then patience, humility, and resignation to the will of God will make him a great man in that. If God be pleased to put him in a high station, integrity, sobriety, and a public spirit will add to the greatness of his condition, and make him a public blessing. V. ALL SIN IS INJUSTICE, WHICH IS BY EVERYBODY LOOKED UPON TO BE A MEAN, BASE THING. It is a common excuse for other defects, that they do nobody any harm, that they are just and honest in their dealings, and therefore they hope that God will overlook other things. Tully says, "Piety is justice toward God," and therefore impiety and disobedience must be injustice. It is the basest and worst sort of injustice, ingratitude. VI. THE HIGHEST END THAT CAN BE PRETENDED TO BY ANY VICE IS ONLY THE PROCURING SOME PLEASURE OR CONVENIENCE FOR OURSELVES, IN OUR PASSAGE THROUGH THIS WORLD. This is but a poor thing if compared with eternity. It is a great advantage of the good man, that he has hope in his death. This may well support him, and make him live cheerfully in any condition in the meantime. Inferences: 1. Since religion is in itself so excellent a thing, this should encourage good men to persist in doing their duty, and not be ashamed either of the profession or the practise of religion. 2. From these considerations of the excellency of religion, all may be urged to the love and practice of it. (*Richard Willis, D.D.*) *The righteous and his neighbour*:—Every righteous man has a neighbour whom he excels. The righteous man and his neighbour are here placed side by side. The righteous is more excellent—I. IN HIS BIRTH AND PARENTAGE. 1. Now "sons of God"—by adoption, by birth, by privilege. 2. "Of your father the devil." Satan nursed into strength the principles of evil, and then planted them in human nature (Gen. iii.). II. IN THE VISIBLE CHARACTER THAT HE BEARS. 1. The name "righteous" is sufficiently indicative. 2. "The lusts of your father ye will do." III. IN THE PRINCIPLE ON WHICH HE ACTS, *i.e.*, LOVE. Two opposite principles—love, hatred. The principles of the righteous are better than their outward character. The principles of the ungodly are worse. IV. IN THE ENDS WHICH HE PURSUES. 1. The glory of God—lasting, noble. 2. The interests of self—transient, base (2 Tim. iii. 2). V. IN THE INFLUENCE WHICH HE EXERTS. The world is a field. 1. The righteous sow in it—to the spirit. 2. The ungodly sow in it—to the flesh. VI. IN THE PLEASURES WHICH HE ENJOYS. 1. Divine, holy, satisfying. 2. Earthly, polluting, unsatisfying (Luke xv. 16). VII. IN THE DESTINY WHICH AWAITS HIM. 1. The maturity of holiness—like Christ. 2. The maturity of ungodliness—like Satan. (1) The deserts of Christ's obedience and atonement—the enjoyment of God for ever. (2) The deserts of sin—"indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish." (*Jas. Stewart.*) *The infallible comparison*:—The term "righteous," as used in Scripture, is not to be limited to the discharge of those duties which man owes to man. It is employed to denote a just and devout and godly person, in distinction from the unrighteous and the wicked. It embraces all we mean by being pious, religious, and good. By the term "neighbour," is not to be understood the vicious and the vile who may live close to the dwelling of the righteous. Compared with the ordinarily praiseworthy neighbour, the devout, God-fearing, decided Christian is at advantage. 1. He is more excellent in the principles by which his conduct is governed. A man may be moral, because he values his reputation, or because it suits his taste, or his health, or advances his worldly interest, and not because God has commanded him to do justly and love mercy. The unrenewed man pursues his own private interest—the righteous will sacrifice it for a greater public good. The man of sterling piety is more worthy of our confidence than the individual who is governed by other motives than those of the fear of God and love to his brethren. 2. More excellent in his example and influence. Every man's life will correspond to the temper of his heart, and the maxims and motives that govern him. When the whole conduct is minutely examined, every man is found what he appears to be. The grace of God improves all the principles of man's moral nature. To the full extent of his circle, his conduct has a salutary effect on all around him. The righteous may be of retired habits, but a pattern will be taken of his life, and it will, like the leaven in the meal, be diffused wherever he is known with more or less of usefulness. His ungodly neighbour can boast of nothing more than a scanty morality, whose highest motive is self-love and self-interest. 3. More excellent in his alliances.

There is a close and endearing relationship between all the subjects of the kingdom of grace. Each is united to God, and to all holy beings, by the tenderest ties of kindred affection. The righteous is entitled to whatever honour and dignity may accrue to him from his union to the Creator, the Redeemer and the Sanctifier, and to every member of the holy household. 4. More excellent inasmuch as he is the heir of a better destiny. Externally, in many points, they may resemble each other now. This may deceive for a while. When the Christian receives his crown of glory, the difference will be seen to be infinite. On the righteous the Redeemer will smile for ever; on the other He will eternally frown. This subject teaches a lesson of humility and gratitude. If we have any excellence of character, it is the gift of God. The superior excellence of the righteous over the wicked shows us the obligations they are under to make their high distinction obvious to the eye of the world.

(D. A. Clark.) *The superior excellency of the religious* :—Never were the qualities of a parent more really derived unto their children than the image and similitude of the Divine excellences are stamped upon heaven-born souls: some beams of that eternal light are darted in upon them, and make them shine with an eminent splendour; and they are always aspiring to a nearer conformity with Him, still breathing after a further communication of His Holy Spirit, and daily finding the power thereof correcting the ruder deformities of their natures, and superinducing the beautiful delineations of God's image upon them, that any one who observes them may perceive their relation to God, by the excellency of their deportment in the world. I. Having regarded the righteous man's excellency, in regard of his birth and extraction, we proceed to CONSIDER HIS QUALITIES AND ENDOWMENTS, and shall begin with those of his understanding, his knowledge, and wisdom. 1. His knowledge is conversant about the noblest objects; he contemplates that infinite Being whose perfections can never enough be admired, but still afford new matter to delight him, to ravish his affections, to raise his wonder. And, if we have a mind to the studies of nature and human science, he is best disposed for it, having his faculties cleared, and his understanding heightened by Divine contemplations. But his knowledge doth not rest in speculations, but directeth his practice, and determineth his choice. And he is the most prudent as well as the most knowing person. He knows how to secure his greatest interest, to provide for the longest life, to prefer solid treasures to gilded trifles, the soul to the body, eternity to a moment. 2. We proceed to another of his endowments, the greatness of his mind and his contempt of the world. To be taken up with trifles, and concerned in little things, is an evidence of a weak and naughty mind. And so are all wicked and irreligious persons. But the pious person hath his thoughts far above these painted vanities; his felicity is not patched up of so mean shreds; it is simple, and comprised in one chief good: his soul advanceth itself by rational passions towards the Author of its being, the fountain of goodness and pleasure: he hath none in heaven but Him; and there is none upon earth whom he desires besides Him. The knowledge of nature hath been reputed a good means to enlarge the soul and breed in it a contempt of earthly enjoyments. He that hath accustomed himself to consider the vastness of the universe, and the final proportion which the point we live in bears to the rest of the world, may perhaps come to think less of the possessions of some acres, or of that fame which can at most spread itself through a small corner of this earth. Whatever be in this, sure I am that the knowledge of God, and the frequent thoughts of heaven, must needs prove far more effectual to elevate and aggrandise the mind. 3. And this, by the affinity, will lead us to another endowment, wherein the excellency of the righteous man doth appear; and that is, that heroic magnanimity and courage wherewith he is inspired, and which makes him confidently achieve the most difficult actions, and resolutely undergo the hardest sufferings that he is called to. Let heathen Rome boast of a Regulus, a Decius, or some two or three more, stimulated by a desire of glory, and perhaps animated by some secret hopes of future reward, who have devoted their life to the service of their country. But alas! what is this to an infinite number, not only of men, but even of women and children, who have died for the profession of their faith, neither seeking nor expecting any praise from men? And tell me who among the heathen did willingly endure the loss of reputation? Nay, that was their idol, and they could not part with it. 4. From courage and magnanimity, we pass to that which is the genuine issue and ordinary consequent of it, the liberty and freedom of the righteous person. Liberty is a privilege so highly rated by all men that many run the greatest hazards for the very name of it: but there are few that enjoy it. I shall not speak of those fetters of

ceremony, and chains of state, wherewith great men are tied; which make their actions constrained, and their converse uneasy: this is more to be pitied than blamed. But wicked and irreligious persons are under a far more shameful bondage: they are slaves to their own lusts, and suffer the violence and tyranny of their irregular appetites. But the holy and religious person hath broken these fetters, cast off the yoke of sin, and become the freeman of the Lord. It is religion that restores freedom to the soul, which philosophy did pretend to; it is that which doth sway and moderate all those blind passions and impetuous affections which else would hinder a man from the possession and enjoyment of himself, and makes him master of his own thoughts, motions, and desires, that he may do with freedom what he judgeth most honest and convenient. 5. Another particular wherein the nobleness and excellency of religion doth appear is in a charitable and benign temper. The righteous is gracious, and full of compassion; he showeth favour and lendeth; and makes it his work to serve mankind as much as he is able. His charity doth not express itself in one particular instance, as that of giving alms; but is vented as many ways as the variety of occasions do call for, and his power can reach to. He assisteth the poor with his money, the ignorant with his counsel, the afflicted with his comfort, the sick with the best of his skill, all with his blessings and prayers. 6. We shall name but one instance more wherein the righteous man excelleth his neighbour; and that is, his venerable temperance and purity. He hath risen above the vaporous sphere of sensual pleasure which darkeneth and debaseth the mind, which sullies its lustre, and abates its native vigour; while profane persons, wallowing in impure lusts, do sink themselves below the condition of men. II. Before we proceed further, IT WILL BE NECESSARY TO TAKE OFF SOME PREJUDICES AND OBJECTIONS THAT ARISE AGAINST THE NOBLENES AND EXCELLENCY OF RELIGION. 1. And the first is, that it enjoineth lowliness and humility; which men ordinarily look upon as an abject and base disposition. But if we ponder the matter we shall find that arrogance and pride are the issues of base and silly minds, a giddiness incident to those who are raised suddenly to unaccustomed height: nor is there any vice doth more palpably defeat its own design, depriving a man of that honour and reputation which it makes him aim at. On the other hand, we shall find humility no silly and sneaking quality; but the greatest height and sublimity of the mind, and the only way to true honour. 2. Another objection against the excellency of a religious temper is, that the love of enemies, and pardon of injuries, which it includeth, is utterly inconsistent with the principles of honour. But if we have any value for the judgment of the wisest man and a great king, he will tell us that it is the honour of a man to cease from strife; and he that is slow to wrath is of great understanding. So that what is here brought as an objection against religion might with reason enough have been brought as an instance of its nobleness. Having thus illustrated and confirmed what is asserted in the text, that the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour, let us improve it in a check to that profane and atheistical spirit of drollery and scoffing at religion which hath got abroad in the world. Alas! do men consider what it is which they make the butt of their scoffs and reproaches? Have they nothing else to exercise their wit and vent their jests upon but that which is the most noble and excellent thing in the world? But let them do what they will; they but kick against the pricks. Religion hath so much native lustre and beauty, that, notwithstanding all the dirt they study to cast upon it, all the melancholy and deformed shapes they dress it in, it will attract the eyes and admiration of all sober and ingenious persons; and while these men study to make it ridiculous, they shall but make themselves so. There are others who have not yet arrived to this height of profaneness, to laugh at all religion, but do vent their malice at those who are more conscientious and severe than themselves, under presumption that they are hypocrites and dissemblers. But besides that in this they may be guilty of a great deal of uncharitableness, it is to be suspected that they bear some secret dislike to piety itself, and hate hypocrisy more for its resemblance of that than for its own viciousness: otherwise whence comes it that they do not express the same animosity against other vices? (*H. Scougal, M.A.*) *The difference between the religious and irreligious man:*—Men without religion will sometimes ask, “Do not all men sin—even the religious? And, if so, is not the whole difference between them and ourselves that our offences are somewhat more numerous than theirs?” Now this must unquestionably be admitted. Still, whatever may be the resemblance upon this point, it is nevertheless true that men with and without

religion differ in many other most important particulars. 1. The first difference between the sins of the religious and the irreligious man is, that the one does not allow himself in his sins and the other does. The real Christian never says, "I know such an action to be wrong, but yet I will do it—I know such an action to be right, but yet I will neglect to do it." But in the other class of men we shall be often struck with the contrary line of conduct. Charge them with their neglect of God, and of their souls, and they say, perhaps, "We confess it to be wrong." Consider the case as between man and man. We may conceive the affectionate child surprised into an act of disobedience or unkindness to the parent whom it loves; but we cannot conceive that child, if truly affectionate, setting itself deliberately and knowingly to wound that parent at the tenderest point. In the one case, an act of disobedience discovers a man in whom, though the flesh is weak, the spirit may be willing—in whom a momentary temptation has prevailed over the settled purpose and desire of his heart. In the other you have a man whose settled purpose is to do wrong. The language of a true Christian must be that of his Master: "I come to do Thy will, O God." 2. A second distinction between a real Christian and one who is not a real Christian is this—the real Christian does not seek or find his happiness in sin. A man who is not really religious, if he wants amusement or indulgence, seeks for it, generally, either in the society of men without religion or in practices which the Word of God condemns. He sins, and it gives him no pain. On the contrary, the real Christian finds no happiness in sin. His pleasure is in prayer, in communion with God. He seeks his happiness in the fields of his duties. "O," says he, "how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day." The state and character of any person may to a great extent be judged by the nature of his pleasures. Does he seek them in trifles? he is a trifling man; does he seek them in worldly pursuits? he is a worldly man; does he seek them in vice? he is a vicious man; does he seek them in God and Christ? he is a Christian. 3. Thirdly, the habits of a real Christian are holy. Men are not to be judged by a few solitary actions of their lives. There is scarcely any life so dark as not to be lighted up by a few brighter actions—as a single star may glimmer through the most cloudy atmosphere; and there is no life so bright as not to be darkened by many spots—as many small clouds are apt to chequer even the clearest sky. But then we determine the real state of the heavens not by the single star, in the one case, or by the few clouds in the other. We ask what is the general aspect, the prevalent appearance: does night or day, does shade or sunshine, prevail? Thus also must we proceed in estimating the character of men. It is the habitual frame of the mind—it is what we may call the work-day character—it is the general, habitual, prevalent temper, conduct, conversation, in the family or the parish, in the shop or the farm, which are the only true tests of our condition. But let us bring the two classes to this standard, and we shall find that in the real Christian the habits are holy—in the insincere Christian they are unholy; that the one is habitually right and accidentally wrong, and the other habitually wrong and accidentally right. Such, then, is another highly important distinction between these classes. 4. Fourthly, every act of sin in real Christians is followed by sincere repentance. No feature is more essentially characteristic of a holy mind than a feeling of deep penitence for transgression. "My sin," said the "man after God's own heart," "is ever before me." 5. A fifth no less important feature by which the real Christian is distinguished is, that he anxiously seeks the pardon of his sins through Jesus Christ. Others too often seem to imagine their sins cancelled immediately upon their bare and cold acknowledgment of them. He, on the contrary, knows that the hatred of sin and indignation at the sinner must be deeply lodged in a mind of infinite purity. And his consolation is this—not that he can save himself, but that "he has an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." 6. The sixth and last point of distinction which I shall have time to notice between the real Christian and every other character is, that he alone seeks diligently from God a power to abstain from sin in future. If others even desire the pardon of their past sins, they are careless about future advancement in holiness. They, perhaps, persist in a course of sinning and repenting, through the whole stage of their lives. Heaven is every day mocked by the language of an unmeaning sorrow. No real hatred for the sin is felt. In the Christian a different feeling prevails. A deep abhorrence of sin mingles with his regret for it. His are tears of hatred as well as grief. There is a substantial distinction between a real Christian and every other character: something more than a mere line or shadowy

difference here. If we carefully observe the several points of distinction which I have noticed, we shall find that they imply in the two classes of characters, in each particular instance, a different state of heart or mind. Let us seek a new and more sanctified nature: more and more of the influences of the sacred Spirit. In the fable of old, when the artist had made the figure of a man, he could not animate it without stealing fire from heaven. That heavenly fire is offered to us. Many has it already quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins. (*Christian Observer.*) **The way of the wicked seduceth them.—On seduction:—**The seduction of the lower class of females is due to the profligacy of men in a superior station in life. It is the custom to confine ourselves to generalities in the pulpit. But the reasoning which applies to all crimes acts languidly against each individual crime—it does not paint the appropriate baseness, or echo the reproaches of the heart. 1. The character of a seducer is base and dishonourable: if deceit is banished among equals; if the conduct of every man, to those of his own station in life, should be marked by veracity and good faith; why are fallacy and falsehood justified, because they are exercised by talents against ignorance, cunning against simplicity, power against weakness, opulence against poverty? No one ever lured a wretched creature to her ruin without such a complication of infamous falsehoods as would have condemned him to everlasting infamy, had they been exercised to the prejudice of any one in a higher scene of life: and what must be the depravity of that man who has no other criterion of what he shall do, or from what he shall abstain, than impunity? 2. To the cruelty of seduction is generally added the baseness of abandoning its object, of leaving to perish in rags and hunger a miserable being bribed by promises and oaths of eternal protection and regard. 3. This crime cannot be defended under any of the ingenious systems by which men are perpetually vitiating their understandings. (*Sidney Smith, M.A.*)

Ver. 27. The slothful man roasteth not that which he took in hunting:—Indolence:—Most hunters have the game they shot or entrapped cooked the same evening or the next day, but not so with this laggard of the text. Too lazy to rip off the hide; too lazy to kindle the fire, and put the gridiron on the coals. What are the causes of laziness, and what are its evil results? 1. Indolence often arises from the natural temperament. I do not know but that there is a constitutional tendency to this vice in every man. Some are very powerfully handicapped by this constitutional tendency. 2. Indolence is often a result of easy circumstances. Rough experience in earlier life seems to be necessary in order to make a man active and enterprising. 3. Another cause of indolence is severe discouragement. There are those around us who started life with the most sanguine expectation; but some sudden and overwhelming misfortune met them, and henceforth they have been inactive. Trouble, instead of making them more determined, has overthrown them. They have lost all self-reliance. They imagine that all men and all occurrences are against them! You cannot rouse them to action. Every great financial panic produces a large crop of such men. 4. Reverie is a cause of indolence. There are multitudes of men who expect to achieve great success in life, who are entirely unwilling to put forth any physical, moral, or intellectual effort. They have a great many eloquent theories of life. They pass their life in dreaming. Let no young man begin life with reverie. There is nothing accomplished without hard work. Do not in idleness expect something to turn up. It will turn down. Indolence and wickedness always make bad luck. 5. Bad habits are a fruitful source of indolence. Sinful indulgences shut a man's shop, and dull his tools, and steal his profits. Dissoluteness is generally the end of industry. What are the results of indolence? A marked consequence of this vice is physical disease. The healthiness of the whole natural world depends upon activity. And indolence endangers the soul. Satan makes his chief conquests over men who either have nothing to do, or, if they have, refuse to do it. Idleness not only leads a man into associations which harm his morals, but often thrusts upon him the worst kind of scepticism. Loafers are almost always infidels, or fast getting to be such. I never knew a man given up to thorough idleness that was converted. Let me tell the idler that there is no hope for him either in this world or in the world that is to come. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) **Labour as enhancing the relative value of a man's possession:—**This applies to many things. I. To MATERIAL WEALTH. II. To SOCIAL POSITION. III. To CIVIL LIBERTY. IV. To RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES. (*Homilist.*) **The castle of indolence:—**Thomson wrote a poem by this title. He

locates the castle in a dreamy land, where every sense is steeped in the most luxurious though enervating delights. The lord of the castle was a powerful enchanter, who, by his arts, enticed thoughtless travellers within the gate, that he might destroy their strength and ruin their hopes by a ceaseless round of voluptuous pleasures. *The slothful man*.—1. The lazy man goes hunting. Some are full of the most bustling activity. An old mathematical professor was wont to define work as “steadily overcoming resistance occurring along a fixed line.” An intermittent, changing activity manifestly fails to answer the requirements of this definition. 2. The slothful man catches game when he does go hunting. Not only does he act, but he does things. But his slothfulness is made manifest in this: though he be effective, he is not efficient; for—3. He is too lazy to cook what he does catch. The excitement of the chase is over, he is weary with dragging home his game, so the gun goes into one corner and the game into another, while the man proceeds—with a celerity which would be praiseworthy were it rightly applied—to forget all about it. He waits for the next excitement. His activity has procured no benefits to himself or any one else. There are many people who lose their labour through a disinclination to put the finishing touch to their work. Under excitement they secure certain results, which, if gathered up and made permanent, would be of immense value. But then they get weary, indifferent. They let things slide—to use an expression of the populace. All they have done gradually undoes itself. For lack of but one stone—the keystone—the arch falls. This is the application: When you commence a thing, cease not until you have gathered up the results of your labour in some form of practical and present benefit to your fellow-men. (*D. C. Gilmore.*)

Ver. 28. *In the way of righteousness is life.*—*Life in the way of righteousness*.—There are many ways which men are found to pursue in order to the attainment of happiness. One pursues the way of worldly pleasure; another is fascinated by the splendour and magnificence and show of the world; another seeks happiness in the business of life. These ways are false ways and disappointing ways. There is a way which is neither delusive nor disappointing. It is the way of holiness, the way of conformity to God's mind and will. The righteous walk in this way. But who are the righteous? They who are interested by faith in the Redeemer's righteousness for justification and acceptance before God. They are distinguished by the integrity of their principles and a conscientious endeavour to discharge every duty they owe their fellow-men. They are careful to avoid all known sin, and desire to live in the practice of all known duty. They are not satisfied with present attainments in religion, but seek to grow in grace as well as knowledge. They are animated by the constraining love of Jesus. They live in the exercise of communion with God in prayer and praise. And the text declares that those who walk in holy obedience to the revealed will of God, and are filled with the fruits of righteousness, have received a new nature, and are animated by a new life. The existence of the life of grace in the soul will be manifested by its corresponding effects in the walk and conversation. In the way of righteousness is the life of consolation and joy. God's smile is on the righteous in all their goings. Great are the privileges of the righteous, which must be felt, but cannot be adequately described. The new life, kindled by the Spirit of God, shall never be extinguished. It shall survive every shock of opposition and trial, and shall triumph over the combined rage of earth and hell. “In the pathway thereof there is no death.” The righteous must die, as well as the unrighteous; there is no peculiarity of exemption in their case from the stroke of the last enemy. But to the believer in Jesus death is unspeakable gain. Then are we in the number of the righteous? (*C. Rawlings, B.A.*) *The way of religion* recommended as—*I. A STRAIGHT, PLAIN, EASY WAY.* God's commands (the rule we are to walk by) are all holy, just, and good. Religion has right, reason, and equity on its side. *II. AS A SAFE, PLEASANT COMFORTABLE WAY.* 1. There is not only life at the end, but there is life in the way; all true comfort and satisfaction. The favour of God, which is better than life; the Spirit, who is life. 2. There is not only life in it, but so as that in it “there is no death,” none of that sorrow of the world which works death, and is an allay to our present joy and life. There is no end to that life that is in the way of righteousness. Here there is life, but there is death too. In the way of righteousness there is life and no death—life and immortality. (*Matthew Henry.*)

CHAPTER XIII.

VER. 1. A wise son heareth his father's instruction : but a scorner heareth not rebuke.—*The heedless scorner* :—The first part of the sentence has been rendered, "is his father's instruction"; i.e., a wise son embodies his father's instruction. A wise man may point to his son and say, "This is the sum-total of my educational efforts." The proverb is careful to define the quality of the son whose education embodies the purposes of his father. He is to be a "wise son"; one who can make the most of his opportunities, who understands the process through which he is passing. A scorner is profited by nothing; being a satirist himself, he turns everything into satire; he mocks the speaker of good things, he parodies the highest poetry, he resents the most delicate and spiritual approach. We should not be struck by the mere ability of satire; we should remember its moral disadvantages, for it debases and impoverishes whatever it touches that is meant for its good. We speak of the satire that takes the moral purpose out of every appeal, and turns to derision all the efforts that are directed towards the soul's real education. Wisdom gathers everything; scorning gathers nothing. It is for each man to say that he will walk in the one spirit or in the other, but let him distinctly know what the consequences of each spirit must be. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The teachable and unteachable son* :—**I. THE TEACHABLE SON.** "A wise son heareth his father's instruction." Solomon, of course, supposes that the father is what a father ought to be. He who attends to the instruction of a father, Solomon says, is wise. He is wise—1. Because he attends to the Divine condition of human improvement. The Creator has ordained that the rising generation should get its wisdom from the teachings of its parents. It is by generations learning of predecessors that the race advances. 2. Because he gratifies the heart of his best earthly friend. **II. THE UNTEACHABLE SON.** "A scorner heareth not rebuke." Some persons justly merit derision; some things merit contempt. A son who scorns either the person or the counsels of his father is not in a state of mind to hear rebuke—he is unteachable. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 2, 3. A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth.—*Natural retaliation* :—Although the spirit and practice of retaliation are nowhere vindicated in Scripture, but everywhere explicitly and strongly condemned, yet a treatment corresponding to their own conduct towards others is what every one may expect. In the nature of things it cannot be otherwise. It is not in human nature, nor in any nature, not even in the Divine itself, to love with the love of complacency that which is unamiable. An amiable disposition alone can secure love; and amiability of disposition is greatly indicated by the tongue. The man who is charitable in his judgments, and disposed to speak well of others, will be himself the subject of charitable judgment and of cordial commendation. All will love and honour and bless the man "in whose tongue is the law of kindness." Thus he shall "eat good by the fruit of his mouth." On the contrary, against the man who is a "transgressor" with his lips, making them the instruments of malice in the utterance of slander, and the fomenting of alienation and strife—against that man are unavoidably kindled all the feelings of indignation, all the angry passions, of which the result is violence—the violence of vindictive pride and sense of wrong. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Man speaking* :—Here are several kinds of speech. **I. THE SELF-PROFITING AND SELF-RUINOUS IN SPEECH.** The speech of a good man which is enlightened, truthful, pure, generous, is of service to himself in many ways. By it he promotes the development of his own spiritual being, he gratifies his own moral nature, and produces in hearers results which are delightful to his own observation. The corrupt speech of the ungodly is a violence to reason, conscience, social propriety. The sinful tongue of the transgressor inflicts the most violent injuries on his own nature. **II. THE SELF-CONTROLLED AND THE SELF-RECKLESS IN SPEECH.** 1. Controlled speech may be useful. The tongue is a member that requires controlling. Passion and impulse are constantly stimulating it to action. 2. Reckless speech may be dangerous. One spark from a lawless tongue has often kindled conflagrations in families, churches, and nations. Quarles says, "Give not thy tongue too much liberty, lest it take thee prisoner." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *A guard upon the lips* is a guard to the soul. He that keeps a strong bridle on his tongue, and a strong hand on that bridle, keeps his soul from a great deal, both of guilt and grief, and saves himself the trouble of many bitter reflections on himself, and reflections of

others upon him. There is many a one ruined by an ungoverned tongue. He that loves to bawl and bluster and make a noise, will find it will be the destruction of his reputation, his interest, and his comfort. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 4. The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.—*The nature and consequences of idleness and of industry:*—This text is true both in a temporal and spiritual sense. I. **THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF SLOTH.** The slothful man wants to attain the end without the use of the proper means. He would be rich without labour, learned without study, and respected without doing anything to deserve respect. This desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour. Such persons waste their days in forming idle schemes and vain wishes. The consequences are often very terrible. They become a plague and a burden to all who are connected with them. They frequently injure their best friends, prey upon the property of others, and bring disgrace and ruin upon their dearest earthly connections. Our land, all our lands, abound with such drones. Slothfulness also gives birth to envy, discontent, fraud, lying, and almost every other evil work. In whatever situation of life a slothful person is fixed, he will, from this disposition, fall into some destructive vice, and become miserable in himself and mischievous to others. A sluggard, whatever he may profess, cannot be a truly religious person, or possessed of those graces which form the character of a member of Christ and a child of God. The sluggard may desire the good things of religion, but as he will not use the means for attaining them, he “desires, and has nothing.” God will be found only of them who diligently seek Him. A slothful disposition is so pernicious in its nature and effects that wherever it reigns and has the dominion, it must debase a person's character and pervert the end for which he was sent into the world. II. **THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF INDUSTRY.** Plenty and comfort are, in general, the consequences of diligence, both in our temporal and spiritual calling. Whatever may be a person's rank or circumstances, the providence of God has given him something to do. The sober and industrious are the glory and strength of every nation. And the industrious disposition is a great preservative against vice. Those who are trained up to honest labour and habits of industry seldom fall into those criminal excesses to which the slothful are prone. The most salutary effects of diligence are seen in religion. The diligent use of all appointed means of grace is crowned with the Divine blessing. These are the persons who have always done the most good in the world, and whom God and men have delighted to honour. There may, of course, be exceptions to the general rule. Would you, then, provide things honest in the sight of all men, pursue your profession with success, maintain yourselves and your families, and become easy in your circumstances, you must be sober and industrious, diligent and laborious. And so you must be if you would enjoy the peace and blessing of God. Some may from this learn the true reason of their embarrassments. They have spent themselves in wishing, not in working. (*W. Richardson.*) *Idleness:*—Work is the grand, all-pervading feature in the government of the world. God works. The universe, considered as an inert mass, moves. Stagnation is the sign of death. How early in life the human being should begin regular employment is a question in which both the moralist and the political economist are interested. The burden, the obligation, the duty of one man differs from that of another. In one sense, the duty of labour is laid upon all. Idleness is to be avoided by all, irrespective of the pressure, or the absence of the pressure, of poverty or any personal needs. It is curious to notice that, in the estimation of many, no persons are thought to be engaged in labour save those who are engaged in some handicraft for their livelihood. But idleness, like labour, is a relative term. Idleness is a sin against the ordinance of God. Man has manifold needs, desires, possibilities. Were there no hunger, there would be no crops, no bread. Were there no need of shelter, there would be no huts, houses, palaces. Were there no sense of ignorance, there would be no desire to learn anything. Were there no religious feeling, there would be no temples, nor desire to know anything of what the apostle calls “the invisible things of God.” The refusal of work, whether demanded of us, or opened to us in the way of providential opportunity, this is idleness. By this refusal one places one's self outside the life of the community. It is a sin—a sin of omission; the sin of neglect, and of lost opportunity. The life is barren, sterile, nothing. “Only an idler,” it may be said; “not as bad as if he gave way to stormy, passionate excesses.” And yet there will be in the brain of that idler an indistinguishable brood of vipers, all possible evil and corruption. God requires the use of our gifts and faculties for

our development, and that we may do our share in the State, fill the position and, in a word, accomplish the purposes of our existence. The proofs of the sinfulness of idleness are to be found in its effects. It destroys our power of usefulness in the world. All real devotion to a cause implies work. We cannot set ourselves in opposition to God's ordinances, and at the same time entertain any belief seriously that we shall succeed by circumventing Him. If any of you, who are in your years of work, when the duty of work is specially your duty, are refusing everything of the kind, and are bent upon trifles or mere amusement, it requires no large insight to perceive that your minds and characters are becoming weakened; the thews and sinews are soft; the gristle does not harden into bone. Let this state of things last, and it is certain that you will be left behind in the rear. Wholesome, not morbid, activity is what is needed for many whose hands hang idly, not through the fault of an idle disposition. Work will heal many a human woe when all else will seem to fail. (*Edwin Harwood, D.D.*) *Christian diligence, with the blessings that attend it* :—The son of diligence, considered either as a man or a Christian, is in a fair way to obtain the good things he seeks. The slothful wretch shall be poor indeed. I. WHAT ARE THE SEVERAL THINGS WHICH ARE IMPLIED IN TRUE DILIGENCE?

1. Diligence includes the employment of every part of our time in proper business. This is opposed to sauntering life away; to trifling, or doing what is to no purpose; and to mistiming the businesses which are to be done. 2. Diligence includes earliness—in opposition to delay. The early man shows that his heart is in his work. If we begin betimes the service of the day, we happily provide against hindrances, and we are not in danger of being thrown into a hurry by accidental avocations. 3. Diligence implies activity and vigour. Lazy wishes will neither perform work nor obtain a blessing. What poor work doth a Christian make who is cold, indifferent, slothful in the things which concern his soul and salvation! 4. Diligence implies watchfulness—in opposition to a drowsy, heedless temper, a thoughtless security of soul. We must be awake to seize all advantages for our work, as well as to guard against surprises and dangers. 5. Diligence implies a constancy in our work—in opposition to looking back, and perpetual avocation by diversions and pleasures. 6. Another thing implied in true diligence is, firmness and resolution in our labour—in opposition to all the difficulties which attend our work. If we are frightened at every shadow of difficulty, we shall never fulfil our service, nor perfect our design. 7. There is also implied perseverance—in opposition to fainting and weariness. It is the end that crowns all. II. THE BLESSINGS WHICH ATTEND DILIGENCE IN A COURSE

OF VIRTUE AND GOODNESS. 1. Diligence hath a natural tendency to success and to obtain the good things we seek. 2. Diligence hath the rich and special promises of a faithful God to encourage its hope. 3. Diligence and industry are a happy guard against snares and temptations of every kind. When the devil finds you idle, he hath a proper moment to assault you with some powerful temptation. 4. Diligence is always making a progress towards its designed end, but the slothful man is in great danger of going backward. The gardener who neglects his daily work will soon find the ground overrun with weeds. 5. The diligent Christian is a most useful person in the world. He does the most good himself, and becomes an excellent example to all that are round about him. 6. The diligent Christian finishes his work with peace, hope, and joy. He will review his conduct and his labours with an inward satisfaction and a sacred pleasure of soul. Let us dread the curse of the wicked and slothful servant. (*Isaac Watts, D.D.*) *Soul-craving* :—I. SOUL-CRAVING IS COMMON TO ALL. Souls have a hunger as well as bodies, and the hunger of the soul is a much more serious thing. What is the *ennui* that makes miserable the rich but the unsatisfied hunger of the soul? 1. The hunger of the soul, as well as the hunger of the body, implies the existence of food somewhere. 2. The unsatisfied hunger of the soul as well as the body is painful and ruinous. II. SOUL-CRAVING CAN BE ALLAYED ONLY BY LABOUR. (*Homilist*.) *Diligence* :—A friend of mine, says Mr. Gurney, one day inquired of the then Lord Chancellor, how he managed to get through so much business? "Oh," said his lordship, "I have three rules; the first is, I am a whole man to one thing at a time; the second is, I never lose a passing opportunity of doing anything that can be done; and the third is, I never entrust to other people what I ought to do myself."

Ver. 5. A righteous man hateth lying.—*Moral truthfulness* :—I. AN INSTINCT TO THE RIGHTeous. "A righteous man hateth lying." A soul that has been made right in relation to the laws of its own spiritual being to the universe and to God has an instinctive repugnance to falsehood. A right-hearted man cannot be false

in speech or life. The prayer of his soul is, "Remove from me the way of lying : and grant me Thy law graciously" (Psa. cxix. 29). II. MORAL TRUTHFULNESS IS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST EVIL. The evils specified in these two verses in connection with the wicked must be regarded as kept off from the righteous by his moral truthfulness. What are the evils here implied connected with falsehood ? 1. Loathsomeness. "A wicked man is loathsome." A liar is an unlovely and an unlovable object ; he is detestable ; he attracts none ; he repels all. 2. Shame. He "cometh to shame." A liar either in lip, or life, or both, must come to shame. A rigorous destiny will strip off his mask, and leave him exposed, a hideous hypocrite, to the scorn of men and angels. 3. Destruction. "Wickedness overthroweth the sinner." Inevitable destruction is the doom of the false. They have built their houses on the sand of fiction, and the storms of reality will lay them in ruins. From all these evils, moral truthfulness guards the righteous. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Lying hateful* :—There is no knowing the effects of a lie even in this world. Said a lady, "I told once for all the fashionable lie of having my servant announce at the door that I was not at home. At night my husband said, 'Mrs. — died to-day.' It went through me like cold steel. She had made me promise that I would be at her bedside at the last hour, as she had something of great importance to disclose. 'And,' said my husband, 'she died in great distress to see you, having sent three times, only to learn that you were not at home.' How I loathed myself ! No more lies for me !"

Ver. 6. **Wickedness overthroweth the sinner.**—*The effects of sin* :—There is a cause for every effect. Moral evil, as a cause, has produced the most awful, alarming, and extensive consequences. I. GIVE THE CHARACTER OF THE SINNER. 1. What is sin ? The transgression of the law (1 John iii. 4). No law, no transgression. There is a law, which is grounded in the moral perfections of God. 2. Sin is a contempt of God's authority. It is a forfeiture of His favour, and an exposure to His sore displeasure. 3. Sinners who refuse to submit to Christ—the Saviour from sin—sin against the gospel law of liberty and love. II. WICKEDNESS IS THE SINNER'S RUIN. 1. It exhausts his property. Sin is a very expensive thing. The passions are clamorous, exorbitant, and reckless, till gratified. 2. It blasts his reputation. Sin can never be deemed honourable, on correct principles. 3. It destroys his health. Intemperance has a natural tendency to undermine the best constitution. 4. It hastens the approach of death. 5. It effects the damnation of the soul. Coming to sin beyond remedy, he goes to his own place. Improvement : 1. How awfully destructive is the love of sin. 2. It is the interest of every person to hate and shun sin. 3. A sinner, perishing in his sin, has no one to blame but himself. 4. From the whole subject we perceive the necessity, expedience, and advantage of securing true religion, by repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The consequences of sin* :—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM "SINNER" ? Bold, brazen sinners. 1. The profligate. 2. The sceptical. 3. The deliberately worldly-minded. II. WHAT IS MEANT BY THESE SINNERS BEING OVERTHROWN ? Wickedness works its own punishment. 1. It overthrows the sinner's health. 2. It overthrows his character. 3. It overthrows his life. The sinner here is a wreck, floating about like a derelict log. His happiness is wrecked. His future prospects are destroyed. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. **There is that maketh himself rich, yet hath nothing.**—*The poor rich and the rich poor* :—Two singularly-contrasted characters are set in opposition here. One, that of a man who lives like a millionaire and is a pauper ; another, that of a man who lives like a pauper and is rich. Now, I do not suppose that the author of this proverb attached any kind of moral to it, in his own mind. It is simply a jotting of an observation drawn from a wide experience ; and if he meant to teach any lesson by it, I suppose it was nothing more than that in regard to money, as to other things, we should avoid extremes, and should try to show what we are, and to be what we seem. This finds its highest application in regard to Christianity, and our relation to Jesus Christ. I. OUR UNIVERSAL POVERTY. However a man may estimate himself and conceit himself, there stand out two salient facts. 1. The fact of universal dependence. Whatever else may be dark and difficult about the co-existence of these two, the infinite God and the finite universe, this at least is sun-clear, that the creature depends absolutely for everything on that infinite Creator. People talk sometimes, and we are all too apt to think, as if God had made the world and left it. And we

are all apt to think that, however we may owe the origination of our own personal existence to a Divine act, the act was done when we began to be, and the life was given as a gift that could be separated from the Bestower. If it were possible to cut a sunbeam in two, so that the further half of it should be separated from its vital union with the great central fire from which it rushed long, long ago, that further half would pale into darkness. And if you cut the connection between God and the creature, the creature shrivels into nothing. So at the very foundation of our being there lies absolute dependence. In like manner, all that we call faculties, capacities, and the like, are, in a far deeper sense than the conventional use of the word "gift" implies, bestowments from Him. As well, then, might the pitcher boast itself of the sparkling water that it only holds, as well might the earthen jar plume itself on the treasure that has been deposited in it, as we make ourselves rich because of the riches that we have received. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his strength. Let not the rich man glory in his riches; but he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." 2. Then, turn to the second of the facts on which this universal poverty depends, and that is, the fact of universal sinfulness. Ah, there is one thing that is our own—"If any power we have, it is to will." Conscience tells us, and we all know it, that we are the causes of our own actions, though from Him come the powers by which we do them. The electricity comes from the central power-station, but it depends on us what sort of wheels we make it drive, and what kind of work we set it to do. So, then, there are these two things, universal dependence and universal sinfulness, and on them is built the declaration of universal poverty. Duty is debt. What we ought is what we owe. We all owe an obedience which none of us has rendered. We are all paupers. II. THE POOR RICH MAN. "There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing." That describes accurately the type of man who ignores dependence, and is not conscious of sin, and so struts about in self-complacent satisfaction with himself, and knows nothing of his true condition. There is nothing more tragic than that a man, laden, as we each of us are, with a burden of evil that we cannot get rid of, should yet conceit himself to possess merits, virtues, graces, that ought to secure for him the admiration of his fellows and the approbation of God. "The deceitfulness of sin" is one of its mightiest powers. You condemn in other people the very things you do yourself. Many of you have never ventured upon a careful examination and appraisement of your own moral and religious character. You durst not, for you are afraid that it would turn out badly. Then you have far too low a standard, and one of the main reasons why you have so low a standard is just because the sins that you do have dulled your consciences. Aye, and more than that. The making of yourself rich is the sure way to prevent yourself from ever being so. We see that in all other regions of life. If a student says to himself, "Oh! I know all that subject," the chances are that he will not get it up any more. And in any department, when a man says, "Lo! I have attained," then he ceases to advance. If you fancy yourselves to be quite well, though a mortal disease has gripped you, you will take no medicine, nor have recourse to any physician. If you think that you have enough good to show for man's judgment and for God's, and have not been convinced of your dependence and your sinfulness, then Jesus Christ will be very little to you. I believe that this generation needs few things more than it needs a deepened consciousness of the reality of sin and of the depth and damnable nature of it. III. THE RICH POOR MAN. "There is that maketh himself poor, and yet"—or, as varied, the expression is, "therefore hath great riches." "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Consciousness of poverty is the only fitting attitude for any of us to take up in view of the fact of our dependence and the fact of our sinfulness. Then let me remind you that this wholesome recognition of facts about ourselves as they are is the sure way to possess the wealth. If you see your poverty, let self-distrust be the nadir, the lowest point, and let faith be the complementary high point, the zenith. The rebound from self-distrust to trust in Christ is that which makes the consciousness of poverty the condition of receiving wealth. And what wealth it is!—the wealth of a peaceful conscience, of a quiet heart, of lofty aims, of a pure mind, of strength according to our need, of an immortal hope, of a treasure in the heavens that faileth not. Do you estimate yourself as you are? Have you taken stock of yourself? Have you got away from the hallucination of possessing wealth? Have you taken the wealth which He freely gives to all who sue in *forma pauperis*? He does not ask you to bring anything but debts and sins, emptiness and weakness, and penitent

faith. And then you will be of those blessed poor ones who are rich through faith, and heirs of the kingdom. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The policy that degrades and the policy that ennobles*:—This proverb denotes either a mean, social fact, or a grand moral contrast. Here is the man who makes himself out to be rich, either to gratify his vanity or to impose on and defraud others. And here is the man who makes himself out to be poor, that he may escape the reproach of neglecting his own kith and kin. Both are essentially and execrably hypocritical. In the first is the hypocrisy of vanity; in the second of greed. Both are dishonest and demoralising. A corrupt state of society alone suggests such expedients, and only a depraved man resorts to them. The Old and New Testaments distinguish between the outer and the inner man. We may make the outer either nurture or kill the inner man. The two conditions, poverty and wealth, betoken no moral difference; they do betoken great social difference. Spiritually the extremes of each may be utterly reversed. The rich may spiritually have nothing, and the poor have great riches. But poverty is not necessarily the concomitant of piety. (*W. Wheeler.*) *The danger of mistaking our spiritual state*:—I. THERE IS THAT MAKETH HIMSELF RICH, YET HATH NOTHING. 1. Such are they who are unacquainted with their real character. Among these may be reckoned all who are ignorant even of fundamental truths, or pervert them. 2. Such are they who, notwithstanding, entertain a high opinion of their spiritual condition. To boast of what we have not is the greatest folly; to glory of what we have is the most intolerable vanity. 3. Such are they who are indifferent to the means of obtaining relief, and the supply of their spiritual wants. II. THERE IS THAT MAKETH HIMSELF POOR, YET HATH GREAT RICHES. 1. Persons of this sort commonly complain much of themselves and their condition. 2. The temper and conduct of such persons serves to discover the mistaken judgment which they have formed of their spiritual condition. From whatever cause this error in opinion may proceed, there is always something in the temper and conduct of people of this sort that shows the high value which they put upon the true riches, and the humbling sense they entertain of their apprehended spiritual poverty. This distinguishes them from those who only pretend to the character of which I am speaking. 3. Notwithstanding they think themselves poor, they have great riches. The Lord, whose loving-kindness is better than life, is their God, the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever. (*W. McCulloch.*) *The truly rich man*:—Amongst great numbers of men accounted rich, but few really are so. I take him to be the only rich man that lives upon what he has, owes nothing, and is contented. For there is no determinate sum of money, nor quantity of estate, that can denote a man rich; since no man is truly rich that has not so much as perfectly satiates his desire of having more. For the desire of more is want, and want is poverty. (*J. Howe.*)

Ver. 9. The light of the righteous rejoiceth: but the lamp of the wicked shall be put out.—*The light of the righteous and the lamp of the wicked*:—By this we are to understand that the light of the righteous burns joyously, is a very image of gladness and rapture: the sun rejoiceth as a giant to run his course; he is, so to say, conscious of his power and of his speed; travelling does not weary him; shining does not exhaust him: at the end he is as mighty as at the beginning. It will be observed that in the one case the word is "light" as applied to the righteous, and in the other the word is "lamp" as applied to the wicked. The path of the just is as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day; the light of the righteous man is above, it is not of his own making, it never can be exhausted: the light in which the wicked man walks is a lamp of his own creation, he made it, he lighted it, he is above and greater than that light, and at any moment it may be extinguished; he walks in the fire and in the sparks which he himself has kindled; he is full of brilliant fancies, flashing and glaring eccentricities; he rejoices transiently in the rockets which he throws up into the air, but as they expire and fall back in dead ashes at his feet he sees how poor have been his resources, and how mean is the issue of a cleverness that is without moral basis and moral inspiration. God's blessing is always attached to the true light. God himself is Light. Jesus Christ was the Light of the world, and Christians are to be lights of their day and generation, reflecting the glory of their Master. The wicked indeed have a kind of light; that should always be amply acknowledged: but it is a light of their own creation, and a light that is doomed to extinction—it shall be put out; a drop of rain shall fall upon it, and the little flicker shall expire, never to be rekindled. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The lights of souls*:—I. THE JOYOUS

LIGHT OF SOUL. "The light of the righteous rejoiceth." In what does the light of the soul consist? There are at least three elements—faith, hope, love. The first fills the soul with the light of ideas; the second, with the light of a bright future; the third, with the light of happy affections. Extinguish these in any soul, and there is the blackness of darkness for ever. The righteous have these as Divine impartations, as beams from "the Father of lights," and in their radiance they live, walk, and rejoice. They rejoice in their faith. Their faith connects them with the Everlasting Sun. They rejoice in their hope. Their hope bears them into the regions of the blest. They rejoice in their love. Their love fixes their enrapturing gaze on Him in whose presence there is fulness of joy. **II. THE TRANSIENT LIGHT OF SOUL.** "The lamp of the wicked shall be put out." It is implied that the light of the righteous is permanent. It is inextinguishable. Not so the light of the wicked. Their light, too, is in their faith, their hope, their love. But their faith is in the false, and it must give way. The temple of their hope is built on sand, and the storm of destiny will destroy it. Their love is on corrupt things, and all that is corrupt must be burnt by the all-consuming fire of eternal justice. Thus the lamp of the wicked must be put out. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 10. Only by pride cometh contention, but with the well-advised is wisdom.
—Pride and humility:—By a proud man we mean one who esteems himself better than others; by a humble man, one who esteems others better than himself. What are the evil effects of pride? 1. It cuts off a man from all the salutary effects of reproof, rebuke, criticism, and counsel, without which it is not possible for any of us to become wise. 2. By pride comes nothing but strife, and he loveth transgression that loveth strife. It is the pride of monarchs and nations that produces war. In the affairs of private life our pride, rather than our sense of right, usually creates, fosters, and embitters divisions, alienations, and quarrels. All the foolish extravagances of social competition are to be traced to the same source. From first to last the haughty spirit is a curse and a torment to every one, and not least to itself. It is like a cold and biting wind. It breaks the heart of the humble, it excites the passions of the wrathful, it corrupts the conduct of the weak. 3. Pride is hateful to God. The proud man, whether he knows it or not, comes into direct conflict with God; he is pitting himself against the Omnipotent. If God is to dwell in a human heart at all, it must be in one which has been emptied of all pride, one which has, as it were, thrown down all the barriers of self-importance, and laid itself open to the incoming Spirit. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) **Pride and contention:**—When pride and passion meet on both sides, it cannot but be that a fire will be kindled; when hard flints strike together, the sparks will fly about; but a soft, mild spirit is a great preserver of its own peace, kills the power of contests, as woolpacks, or such-like soft matter, most deaden the force of bullets. (*T. Leighton.*)

Ver. 11. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.—**Right methods of obtaining wealth:**—The text implies three things. **I. THAT WEALTH IN ITSELF IS A GOOD THING.** 1. All men strive for it, in obedience to the original command to possess the earth and subdue it. 2. The services it can render are evidences of its value. 3. The Word of God approves it. Not money, but the "love" of it, is "a root of evil." **II. WEALTH MAY BE OBTAINED IN DIFFERENT WAYS.** The two ways mentioned in the text. 1. The way of vanity, which may represent fraud, gambling, reckless speculation, &c. 2. The way of labour, in all which there is profit (chap. xiv. 23). See frequent commendations of diligence in the Scriptures. **III. THE INCREASE OR DECREASE OF WEALTH IS AFFECTED BY THE MODE OF ITS ACQUISITION.** "Gotten by vanity," it diminishes; procured by labour, it "shall increase." Two considerations as to the constitution of human nature help us to understand how this comes about. 1. What a man does not work for he seldom appreciates. Difficulty of attaining augments value. "Easy got, soon spent," has passed into a proverb. 2. What one does not value he is apt to squander. Spendthrifts are those who value money slightly. (*F. Wagstaff.*) **Ill-gotten national wealth:**—What is true of private is no less true of public possessions. When such possessions are obtained, on the part of any country, by self-aggrandising and unprovoked aggression, extermination and conquest, what are such means but injustice, oppression, and murder, on an extended scale? Gathering possessions by a violation of the rights of others, of the principles of equity and honour and good faith, or, in one word, of the royal law, is turning a country's

glory into shame, and under the righteous and retributive administration of Heaven the extension of dominion is but an extension of danger. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *Wealth gotten by vanity* :—When the famous M. Blanc, who founded the Monte Carlo Casino, was proprietor of a gambling establishment at Homburg, it was his custom to bring down 300,000 francs every morning to meet the bank's losses. When this sum was exhausted the bank was said to be "broke," and the doors were closed for the day, and it is recorded that the unique feat of "breaking the bank" was accomplished three days in succession by the notorious South American Spaniard, Garcia. After this his luck began to turn, and six weeks later he was obliged to ask M. Blanc for a few louis with which to return to Paris. (*Daily Mail.*)

Ver. 12. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.—*Hope deferred* :—Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, whether the person hoping, or the thing hoped for, be good or evil. The second member of the text is a dividing word. "Tree of life" belongs only to the hope of the holy. Many, after waiting long, and expecting eagerly, discover, when at last they reach their object, that it is a withered branch and not a living tree. There is no peace to the wicked. They are always either desiring or possessing; but to desire and to possess a perishable portion are only two different kinds of misery to men. If the desire is pure, the attainment of it is a tree of life; it is living, satisfying, enduring. It has a living root in the ground and satisfying fruit upon the branches. Where a hungering for righteousness secretly rises in a human heart the blessing is already sure, but it is not enjoyed yet. The hungerer "shall be filled," but in the meantime his only experience is an uneasy sensation of want. In God's good time that desire will be satisfied. That longing soul will taste and see that the Lord is gracious. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed.—*Man's destruction* :—The more literal rendering would be, "He that despiseth the Word shall bring ruin on himself." This is a great law of the Biblical revelation—namely, that destruction is not a merely arbitrary act on the part of God, a mere penalty, but that it involves the idea of suicide or self-ruin. The law of reward and also the law of punishment are to be found within ourselves. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. The law of the wise is a fountain of life.—*The law of the good* :—I. THE GOOD ARE RULED BY LAW—"The law of the wise." What is law? The clearest and most general idea I have of it is—rule of motion. In this sense all things are under law, for all things are in motion. The material universe is in motion, and there is the law that regulates it. The spiritual universe is in motion, and law presides over it. "Of law," says Hooker, "there can be no less acknowledged than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world. All things do her homage, the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power; both angels and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy." But what is the law of the good—that which rules them in all their activities? Supreme love to the supremely good. II. THE LAW THAT RULES THE GOOD IS BENEFICENT. "The law of the wise is a fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." 1. This law delivers from death. The word death here must not be regarded as the separation of body from soul, but as the separation of the soul from God. This is the awfulest death, and supreme love to God is a guarantee against this. 2. This law secures an abundance of life. "The law of the wise is a fountain of life"; a fountain gives the idea of activity, plenitude, perennialness. The law of the good is happiness. The happiness of the true soul is not something then and yonder, but it is something in the law that controls him. In the midst of his privations and dangers John Howard, England's illustrious philanthropist, wrote from Riga these words—"I hope I have sources of enjoyment that depend not on the particular spot I inhabit. A rightly cultivated mind, under the power of religion, and the exercise of beneficent dispositions, affords a ground of satisfaction little affected by 'heres' and 'theres.'" (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. Good understanding giveth favour.—*A sound intellect* :—I. THE NATURE OF A SOUND INTELLECT. A good understanding must include four things. 1. Enlightenment. The soul without knowledge is not good. A good under-

standing is that which is well informed, not merely in general knowledge, but in the science of duty and of God. 2. Impartiality. A good intellect should hold the balance of thought with a steady hand. 3. Religiousness. It must be inspired with a deep sense of its allegiance to heaven. 4. Practicalness. It should be strong and bold enough to carry all its decisions into actual life. "A good understanding have all they that do His commandments." Thus it appears a good understanding is tantamount to practical godliness. II. THE USEFULNESS OF A SOUND INTELLECT. The greatest benefactor is the man of a good understanding. The thoughts of such men as these are the seeds of the world's best institutions, and most useful arts and inventions. The man of good understanding is the most useful in the family, in the neighbourhood, in the market, in the press, in the senate, in the pulpit, everywhere. 1. No favours so valuable as mental favours. He who really helps the mind to think with accuracy, freedom, and force, to love with purity, and to hope with reason, helps the man in the entirety of his being. 2. No one can confer mental favours who has not a good understanding. An ignorant man has no favour to bestow on souls. "Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge the wing with which we fly to heaven" (Shakespeare). Let us, therefore, cultivate a sound intellect. "I make not my head a grave," says Sir T. Browne, in his quaint way, "but a treasury of knowledge; I intend no monopoly, but a community in learning; I study not for my own sake only, but for theirs that study not for themselves; I envy no man that knows more than myself, but pity them that know less. I instruct no man as an exercise of my knowledge, or with an intent rather to nourish and keep it alive in mine own head than beget and propagate it in his; and, in the midst of all my endeavours, there is but one thought that dejects me—that my acquired parts must perish with myself, nor can be legacied among my honoured friends." (*Homilist*.) But the way of transgressors is hard.—*The course, act, and punishment of sin*.—I. THE COURSE OF SIN. 1. A disposition to regard life as a matter of circumstances. Personal freedom is, however, never nullified, personal responsibility never suspended. The track and trend of a man's life is largely within his own determination. 2. The text speaks of "a way," i.e., a trodden path. It refers to a course that is chosen, and persisted in. It is the habit of the sinner's life—a much-frequented track. 3. Sin indulged in soon becomes sin confirmed. How soon a track is made across the soft earth. The "dearest idol" was once a plaything, a diversion. 4. This is the sure and certain tendency of sin. "Wild oats" mean a harvest of thorns. It is a cruel thing that is done, when men speak lightly of what is wrong. II. THE ACT OF SIN. 1. Sin is one: a great, awful unit. But sin is viewed under various aspects. Here the idea is that of one who deals treacherously, one who deceives, or deceives himself. 2. This is the quality of sin committed in Christian lands. Sin "against light and love." This is sin which makes pity impossible, save with God, and with such as the Godlike. III. THE PUNISHMENT OF SIN. All sin is visited with punishment. The "pleasures of sin" are but "for a season." The punishment comes. The present punishment of sin is here emphasised; if that is not enough to drive you from the way of the transgressor, what of the death-bed, of the judgment-seat, of the never-dying worm? Where, then, is salvation? Look at what is suggested by one and another. 1. Retirement; a life of seclusion and penitence. 2. A firm stand against the encroaching sin. 3. Altered associations. These are the proposals of policy, or human calculations. God's proposal for salvation is an absolute and unconditional forsaking. (*George Lester*.) *The hardship of sin*.—But who believes this? None who set their opinion against the testimony of revelation. I. WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY THE WAY OF TRANSGRESSORS? Transgressor is but another name for sinner. Transgression supposeth either something done that was forbidden or something omitted that was commanded. II. THE DOCTRINE OF THE TEXT RESPECTING THIS WAY. It is not rendered harder than it ought to be, through undue severity in God. 1. The kindness of God renders it difficult either to shun or to resist the light. 2. It is sometimes necessary for the Divine Being to carry Himself with some severity against daring and obdurate sinners, for a warning to others. 3. Jehovah's efforts to save render those who finally abuse His goodness singularly criminal. Improvements: (1) How much sinners are deceived in this "way of the transgressors"! (2) What madness will it be for any to continue in it! (3) It will be impossible for any to be saved who will not quit it. (4) What a mercy that we may yet do so! (5) While we are in the way with the Lord, let us humble ourselves before Him, let us return to Him, and sue for His salvation. (*Sketches of Four Hundred*

Sermons.) *The way of transgressors hard*:—In regard to a large class of sins, retribution follows in the present life. Sin never pays. It means sorrow, distress, pain, whether that pain follows immediately or after a while. The point of the text is, that retribution follows now, in this present world. The earliest steps of vice seem pleasant; if it were not so, it would offer no temptation. To yield to lower appetites and passions is so easy, so natural, so inviting. But the wilful do not go far without being brought to a very different conclusion. "The way of transgressors" turns out to be rough and hard. I might endeavour to deter you from evil courses by telling you of the judgment to come; but what I wish to impress is that there is a day of reckoning even here. Look at the misery which intemperance brings; which licentiousness brings; which gambling brings; which fraudulent dealing brings. Then let this be the hour of your final, and ever-to-be-remembered decision for God and righteousness. (*J. T. Davidson, D.D.*)

Warning against transgressors' ways:—Four losses, caused by transgression, which help to make the way hard. 1. The loss of a good conscience. 2. The loss of character. 3. The loss of usefulness. 4. The loss of the soul. When we go into the way of transgressors, we do not know that we shall ever have an opportunity of repenting and believing in Jesus. And no matter what part of the transgressors' ways we may have walked in, we shall find it a hard way, because it will be sure to bring the loss of heaven to us. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

The hard way of sin:—I. The way of the sinner is a hard way, BECAUSE IT IS UNPROFITABLE—hard work and poor pay—the devil is a hard lord and a mean paymaster. II. It is a hard way, BECAUSE IN THE END IT IS USUALLY A FAILURE. Most men see only the present, and when summer is here one feels it must never end; but winter comes on at last. III. It is a hard way, BECAUSE OPPOSED TO ALL THE STRONGER PRINCIPLES THAT PREVAIL IN LIFE AND DESTINY. The transgressor braves the mighty current of that eternal river which has swept on its bosom every being borne down to the shoreless sea of the judgment of God. Examples: Absalom, Judas, Pharaoh. No use fighting against God. IV. It is a hard way, BECAUSE IT IS AN UNHAPPY WAY. Conscience and all the better self rebel—opposed to all one's highest associates and surroundings. V. A hard way, BECAUSE IT ENDS IN ETERNAL RUIN—no opportunity to repair the damage. A hard life here, and hereafter eternal ruin! VI. THE ONLY EASY WAY IS THE WAY OF OBEDIENCE—the life that now is and the life that is to come. Turn from your hard master and serve the Lord Jesus Christ, whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light. (*C. G. Wright.*)

The rough road:—I. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A TRANSGRESSOR? One who breaks a law or violates a command. II. THE PAINFUL PATH. The R.V. says, "But the way of the treacherous is rugged." The way of wickedness is difficult and dangerous to travel as a rugged road. How true; young people may not think so; but old men will tell you the prophet knew what he was saying when he uttered the words, "They weary themselves to commit iniquity." Chrysostom says, "Virtue is easier than vice." Mr. H. W. Beecher used to tell of a man in America "who had the habit of stealing all his firewood. He would get up on cold nights and go and take it from his neighbours' woodpiles. It was ascertained that he spent more time and worked harder to get his fuel than he would have been obliged to if he had earned it in an honest way, and at ordinary wages." And this is a type of thousands of men who work a great deal harder to please the devil than they would have to work to please God. It is easier to be sober than intemperate, honest than dishonest, &c. III. THE WAY IS HARD; FOR IT IS FREQUENTLY A PATH OF SORROW AND SUFFERING. "As certain serpents before they strike their prey fix their eyes upon it and fascinate it, and then at last devour it, so does sin fascinate the foolish sons of Adam—they are charmed with it, and perish for it." "Woe unto their souls, for they have rewarded evil to themselves." IV. THE WAY IS HARD; FOR IT IS THE WAY OF BITTER RECOLLECTIONS. (*J. E. Whydale.*)

Personal responsibility:—I. MAN IS CONSTITUTED TO AVOID TRANSGRESSION. This is taught by—1. Physical science. 2. Moral consciousness. 3. Common experience. II. MAN IS PUNISHED FOR EACH TRANSGRESSION. 1. Each sinful act increases sinful desire. 2. Each sinful act weakens spiritual strength. As the sinful desire weakens, the power of resistance diminishes. A reed that has been overcome by the rushing torrent finds it more difficult to stand erect before the next. 3. Each single act is living in the memory. III. MAN IS PUNISHED BY AN ETERNAL LAW WHICH CONDEMNS TRANSGRESSION. 1. This is a law additional to, but in harmony with, his constitution. 2. This is a law to be satisfied only by atonement. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*)

The way of transgressors is hard:—A murderer's last

words are seldom very edifying, as it often happens that they are merely the expression of conviction that the speaker, in spite of his crimes, is going straight from the scaffold to heaven. The dying words of James Tracy, executed in Chicago, are, however, an exception to the rule. They deserve the careful attention of young people who think that it is a fine thing "to see life," by which they generally mean vicious life. Tracy said, "I do not believe any man who has known a life of virtue can ever be contented with a life of vice. The farmer who has spent his life on his farm, never seeing more of the world than the road to market, or more of society than the village congregation, is happier than the 'sporting man' who gets his money easily but questionably, and sees society in its wildest dissipation. I hope that my fate may prove a warning to young men who are cheating themselves with the idea that there can be any peace, happiness, or prosperity in a crooked life." Perhaps the readers of immoral novels and young people attracted by the pleasures of vice will heed the solemn statement of a man who was qualified to speak with authority, even though they despise the same warning given in the Bible.

Ver. 16. Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly.—*The wise and the foolish*.—I. THE WISE MAN. "He dealeth with knowledge." This implies—1. That he has knowledge. Knowledge is essential to a wise man. All true knowledge has its foundation in God. There is no knowledge that includes Him not. It implies—2. That a wise man treats his knowledge wisely. "He dealeth with knowledge." A man may have a great deal of knowledge, and no wisdom. Wisdom consists in the right application of knowledge. The wise man so deals with his knowledge as to culture his own nature and promote the real progress of his race. "Perfect freedom," says Plato, "hath four parts—viz., wisdom, the principle of doing things aright; justice, the principle of doing things equally in public and private; fortitude, the principle of not flying danger, but meeting it; and temperance, the principle of subduing desires, and living moderately." II. THE FOOLISH MAN. Foolish men show their folly in at least two ways. 1. By talking about things of which they know little or nothing. There are two notable facts in human nature. Empty-minded persons are generally talkative. The thinker, discerning difficulties in every turn, moves cautiously, reverently, and even with hesitation. 2. By attempting things which they are incapable of achieving. The foolish man knows not his aptitudes and inaptitudes. Hence he is seen everywhere, striving to be what he never can be; to do that which he never can accomplish. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 17. A wicked messenger falleth into mischief: but a faithful ambassador is health.—*Ministers are ambassadors*.—I. JUSTIFY THE COMPARISON OF THE AMBASSADOR AND THE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL. Observe—1. The high commission under which they act. The ambassador is invested with authority to perform business of the utmost importance to the well-being of both countries with which he is concerned. Is not this true of those servants of the Most High God who show to men the way of salvation? The office of the ministry is not of human, but of Divine origin. 2. Their required qualifications. An ambassador must be particularly instructed for his work; he must accurately know the mind and will of his employer, and the claims of the respective parties in reference to whom he treats. And a minister should be a man whose mind has been thoroughly enlightened by the truths of the gospel. He is set for the defence of the gospel, so he must show himself a scribe well instructed in the kingdom of heaven—one able rightly to divide the Word of truth. 3. The peculiar character of their transactions. The ambassador is often sent to arrange terms of peace. And in this sense, ministers are "ambassadors for Christ." 4. The issue of their negotiations. "A faithful ambassador is health." This refers to three things—the healing of those breaches and contentions which had previously broken forth and prevailed; the excellency of the benefits which accrue to the reconciled party; and the promotion to honour and prosperity of the successful ambassador. Each of these ideas is applicable to the higher exercises of the holy ambassadorship. II. CONSIDERATIONS TO URGE YOU TO ACCEDE TO THE PROPOSALS WE ADVANCE. 1. It is derived from the expensive preparation made by the offended party to effect the desired conciliation. 2. The second consideration is drawn from the imminent peril of rejecting the proposals which we advance. 3. Think of the countless advantages of conciliation. 4. Reflect on the transitoriness of the period during which these negotiators must

fulfil all the important ends of their embassy. Happy, thrice happy, are they who have been brought into a state of reconciliation with God. (*John Clayton, jun.*)

Ver. 18. **But he that regardeth reproof shall be honoured.**—*Accepting reproof*:—One of the weakest traits of any person is to be unwilling to accept honest criticism and correction. From the foolish child who will never listen to parental authority, on to the foolish man who will never listen to rebuke or reason, pride always goeth before a fall. Honest criticism is often a bitter dose to swallow, but most tonics are bitter, and we are the stronger for taking them down bravely. "If I am censured," said that godly man, Bishop Griswold, "then let me correct, but never justify, my faults." A minister with more zeal than discretion once called on the bishop and belaboured him with rather a harsh denunciation. Instead of showing the man out of the door, the bishop calmly replied, "My dear friend, I do not wonder that they who witness the inconsistencies in my daily conduct should think that I have no religion. I often fear this myself, and I feel very grateful to you for giving me this warning." This reply was made in such unaffected meekness and sincerity that the visitor at once begged the bishop's pardon, and always regarded him afterwards as one of the most Christlike Christians he had ever known. He is doubly the fool who not only flings himself into a pit, but resents the friendly hand that tries to help him out of it. (*T. C. Cuyler.*)

Ver. 19. **The desire accomplished is sweet to the soul.**—*Soul pleasure and soul pain*.—I. SOUL PLEASURE. What is it? 1. An accomplished desire. Desire is the spring power of our activities. Locke defines it "as the uneasiness which a man feels within him on the absence of anything whose present enjoyment carries the delight with it." The desires of the soul, which are very varied, are very significant of our destiny. "Our desires," says Goethe, "are the presentiments of the faculties which lie within us, the precursors of those things which we are capable of performing. That which we would be and that which we desire present themselves to our imagination, about us and in the future. We prove our aspiration after an object which we already secretly possess. It is thus that an intense anticipation transforms a real possibility into an imaginary reality. When such a tendency is decided in us, at each stage of our development a portion of our primitive desire accomplishes itself under favourable circumstances by direct means, and in unfavourable circumstances by some more circuitous route, from which, however, we never fail to reach the straight road again." Indeed, pleasure consists in the gratification of desires. 2. The quality and permanency of the pleasure must ever depend on the object of the desire. If the thing desired is immoral, its attainment will be "sweet to the soul" for a little while, but afterwards it will become bitter as wormwood and gall. The triumph of truth, the progress of virtue, the diffusion of happiness, the honour of God, these are objects of desire that should give a holy and everlasting sweetness to the soul. God Himself should be the grand object of desire. "As for me, I will behold Thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness." II. SOUL PAIN. "It is an abomination to fools to depart from evil." 1. There is soul pain in being connected with evil. Conscience is always tormenting the sinner; from its nature it can never be reconciled to an alliance with evil. 2. There is soul pain in the dissolution of that connection. There is a fierce conflict, a tremendous battle in the effort. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 20. **He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.**—*Walking with wise men a means of attaining wisdom*.—I. WHAT IS IT TO WALK WITH WISE MEN? It is to choose persons of that character for our intimate friends, and voluntarily join in their company and conversation. Walking is the motion which one chooseth. Walking with a person denoteth a friendly communication and delightful society, taking him into our councils, intimating our difficulties to him, seeking his advice and depending on his aid. The mere involuntary presence with the vicious, or being unwillingly deprived of the society of the good, is not a trespass against the rule here recommended. It may be necessary for good men to converse familiarly with the wicked, yet this may be without a participation in their crimes. Our Saviour conversed with publicans and sinners. The present state of human affairs requireth that we associate with men of all characters. And, in nearer relations, scarce is there any so happy as to be free from the company of fools. On the other hand, it is not to be supposed

that the mere advantage of any man's providential situation will entitle him to the benefit of walking with wise men. The necessary thing is voluntarily to associate, and of choice enter into intimacies of friendship with the wise. Men of all capacities and conditions show a desire for conversation and society. Everybody wants company. Agreeableness of character and disposition directeth men's choice of company. Walking with wise men imports the improvement of conversation for the purposes of wisdom. Our choice should be determined with regard to virtue.

II. THE INFLUENCE AND EFFICACY OF WALKING WITH WISE MEN AS A MEANS OF ATTAINING WISDOM. Company has a great share in forming the tempers and manners of men. The influence is explained by—1. A desire to be agreeable to those we converse with. This is powerful in human nature. The desire of approbation is strong. 2. The force of example. Mankind is prone to imitation. To represent religion in precepts does not so powerfully move the affections as when we see it delineated in life. The rules of religious virtue are reduced to practice in men of like passions with us, who also were "compassed" about with infirmities. Though their example is but imperfect, yet it is very worthy of our imitation, and most sensibly reproaches our failures. The nearer the example is the greater force it has. We are specially influenced, not by the example of saints and martyrs, but by the less celebrated instances of piety and virtue in our own familiar acquaintance. Practical reflections: 1. Wise, that is, virtuous and good men, are a great blessing to the world, though they are frequently despised in it. Good lives are the most effectual preachers of righteousness, and continually solicit men to reform. 2. Bad men are not only useless to the greatest purposes of life, but mischievous in society. 3. We ought to be very careful in the choice of our friends and intimate companions. It is not every kind of familiarity among men that is worthy the sacred name of friendship. When founded on selfish, corrupt affections and passions, it is not only vicious, but humoursome, precarious, and inconstant, yielding no solid and abiding pleasure. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*)

The influence of conversation, with the regulation thereof:—Conversation has ever had a mighty influence on the conduct of human life. The regulation of it has, in all ages, demanded the utmost prudence and caution. **I. MEN GENERALLY BECOME SUCH AS THE COMPANY THEY KEEP.** All men are naturally lovers of themselves, and therefore the most effectual way of endearing and obliging one another is by mutual respects and compliances: no man can make his court more effectually to another than by falling in with him in opinion and practice, approving his judgment, and observing his inclinations: this is that which flatters our self-love, the predominant principle in our natures; this is that which renders society agreeable and friendship lasting. Ere we can be pleased ourselves, or please others, we must be mutually fashioned and moulded into an agreement and conformity of principles and morals, we must be acted and governed by the same affections and inclinations, and moved and led by the same desires and passions. Hence the proposition that men generally are such as their companions are. Two things in wise men never fail to work upon their friends and acquaintances.

1. Good discourse. What light, what strength, what pleasure does it minister! How it awakens the conscience and purifies the heart! "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge." Such discourse "ministers grace unto the hearers."

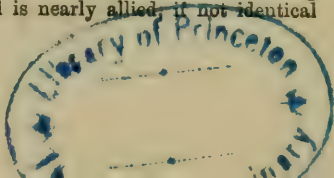
2. Good example. Virtue never appears so beautiful and lovely as in action. It is represented with much more life in the practice of a wise and good man than it can be in rules and precepts. The excellences and perfections of a friend are very strong incitements to emulation and very sensible reproofs of our remissness. A good life in a companion is certainly a mighty motive and encouragement for us. We see in him not only what we ought to do, but what we may do. Whatever is possible to him is possible to us. As to the influence of bad company, it is clear that sin is catching and infectious; ill principles and practices are soon propagated.

1. Sin is the cement of the friendships and intimacies of sinners. 2. Ill company naturally instils and propagates vicious principles, worldly maxims, sensual carnal improvements. 3. Ill company creates confidence in sin. **II. HAPPINESS IS THE FRUIT OF WISDOM, AND MISERY OF FOLLY.** Both reason and revelation and experience tell us that sin is fruitless and dishonourable. Righteousness fills the mind with peace and joy; sin tortures it with contradictions and unreasonable passions, with the guilt and the terrors of the Lord. **III. ADVICE AS TO KEEPING COMPANY.** 1. We must be very cautious what company we keep. 2. We must endeavour to make the best use of it. 3. We must be fully persuaded that the due government of ourselves in this point is a matter of the highest moment. (*J. Lucas.*) *The*

attainment of wisdom:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY WALKING WITH THE WISE? 1. It means, to converse with the writings of the wise. 2. To choose wise persons for our companions and to lose no opportunity of receiving their advice and instruction. Providence may appoint a good man's station amongst sinners, either for a trial of his integrity, or to give him opportunity to use his best endeavours to reclaim them. Civil communities, so absolutely necessary for mankind, are composed of good and bad in such a variety of degrees that there are few good without some bad qualities, and few bad without some good ones. Men are disposed to seek society and to form acquaintances, larger or lesser, for their worldly concerns and for their mutual satisfaction and entertainment. This general inclination, or instinct, operates freely and variously, and for the most part it induces men to seek those who are of a like character and disposition with themselves. II. THE INFLUENCE AND EFFICACY WHICH SUCH CONDUCT HATH TOWARDS THE ATTAINMENT OF WISDOM. Conversation hath a considerable share in forming the tempers and manners of men. Their behaviour and their moral and religious dispositions depend much on the company they keep. The influence which the behaviour and discourse of others hath upon us may be ascribed to two causes. 1. A desire of being agreeable to those with whom we are familiar. 2. To the force of example. And the nearer the example is the more force it acquires. (*John Jortin, D.D.*)

Walking with wise men:—I. THE IMPORT OF THE CHARACTER COMMENDED. "Wise man." 1. Wisdom is that rectitude of mind which enables a man to judge what are the best ends, and what are the best means to obtain those ends. They are wise in the highest sense who possess a knowledge of God, and of spiritual truth. 2. Wisdom includes a reverent obedience to the Divine commands, and an earnest concern for personal salvation. II. THE METHOD OF THE ASSOCIATION ADVISED. That we walk with wise men; hold mental intercourse and fellowship with them. Two modes by which this association may be formed. 1. By studying their writings. 2. By cultivating their personal friendship. III. THE VALUE OF THE PROMISE SECURED. "Shall be wise." He shall rise, by association, to the attainment of the same character as that with which he has been connected. If we be rendered wise, we have—1. The possession of dignity. 2. The capacity of usefulness. 3. The certainty of happiness. (*James Parsons.*) *Influence of good associates*:—This subject is illustrated by the Persian moralist Saadi: "A friend of mine put into my hands a piece of scented clay; I took it, and said to it, 'Art thou musk or ambergris, for I am charmed with thy perfume?' It answered, 'I was a despicable piece of clay, but I was some time in the company of the rose; the sweet quality of my companion was communicated to me, otherwise I should only be a bit of clay, as I appear to be.'"

Character affected by intercourse:—By "wisdom" is meant "religion." I. HE THAT WALKS WITH RELIGIOUS MEN WILL BECOME RELIGIOUS. The term "walk" signifies a continued course of conduct, or a manner of living, in which men persevere till it becomes habitual. The place to which every religious person is travelling is heaven. All who would walk with them must make heaven the object of their pursuit. The only way to heaven is Jesus Christ. All who walk with religious persons must agree in assenting to this truth. 1. The fact that a person chooses to associate with religious characters, in religious pursuits, proves that he is already the subject of serious impressions. 2. He who walks with religious persons, will see and hear many things which powerfully tend to increase and perpetuate those serious impressions. 3. One who walks with religious men must be the subject of serious impressions for many years successively. He who continues to walk with religious men to the end of his life will become religious. II. A COMPANION OF SINNERS SHALL BE DESTROYED. That is, one who chooses for his associates persons who are regardless of religion. 1. Such an one is the subject of no religious impressions; he has few, if any, serious thoughts. 2. Such an one takes the most effectual way to prevent any serious impressions ever being made on his mind. 3. Such an one takes the most effectual way to banish those serious thoughts that do come. 4. Such an one gets confirmed in habits and feelings opposed to his ever becoming religious. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *The power of association*:—Every one exerts an influence on some others, and in turn is acted on by them. It is vain to endeavour to escape, or destroy, this mutual influence. There is a strong tendency in human character to the assimilating itself to that of those with whom it is in contact. The text represents the acquisition of wisdom as a direct consequence of the associating, or walking with, the wise. The association must be both intimate and voluntary. There is in all of us the desire of being esteemed or approved. This desire of approval is nearly allied, it not identical



with, that dislike of being singular which has so mighty an operation on all classes of mind. It is almost a necessary consequence on this, that we shall gradually, though perhaps imperceptibly, assimilate ourselves to the tastes and tendencies of our companions. Illustrate a man, not of vicious habits himself, thrown continually into association with the dissolute. Unless he has great moral courage, he will inevitably assimilate to the vicious. His virtuous principles get secretly undermined. We cannot argue, with equal probability, that if the case were that of a vicious man associated with virtuous the result would be a conformity of character. There is a tendency in our nature to the imitation of what is wrong, but not—at least not in the same degree—to the imitation of what is right. There is, however, a strong probability that, through association with virtuous men, the vicious will in a degree be shamed out of his viciousness. If you add the force of example to the desire of approval, the probability will be heightened. Known facts of experience bear out our text. Then walk with the wise that are dead—be specially careful what authors, what books you make your companions. And walk with the wise of the living, with the virtuous, with the righteous. Nay, walk with God. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *Ruinous company*:—Sin is catching, is infectious, is epidemic. Not appreciating the truth of my text, many a young man has been destroyed. 1. Shun the sceptic. 2. Shun the companionship of idlers. 3. Shun the perpetual pleasure-seeker. Rather than enter the companionship of such, accept the invitation to a better feast. The promises of God are the fruits. The harps of heaven are the music. Clusters from the vineyards of God have been pressed into the tankards. Her name is religion. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*) *The grand fellowship and assimilation in life's path*:—I. THE GRAND FELLOWSHIP IN LIFE'S PATH. Though fools crowd the path of life, there are many "wise men" here and there. Who are the wise men? 1. The men who aim at the highest end of existence. What is the highest end? Not wealth, pleasure, fame, &c. The highest end of man, the only worthy end, is eternal perfection of character, spiritual assimilation to God's perfection. Who are the wise men? 2. The men who employ the best means to reach that end. Who are the wise men? 3. The men who devote the best time in the employment of those means. II. THE GLORIOUS ASSIMILATION IN LIFE'S PATH. "Shall be wise." 1. There is a transforming power in the ideas of the truly wise. The ideas of "wise men" are like the rays of the sun—warm, bright, touching all into life. In the Bible you have these ideas in their mightiest form. 2. There is a transforming power in the sympathies of the truly wise. Sympathy is a mighty power. Even a touch of it in the dropping tear, the faltering voice, the quivering lip, will often move a soul to its centre. The sympathies of the wise man are deep, spiritual, genuine, Christlike. They are morally electric. 3. There is a transforming power in the example of the truly wise. All moral character is formed on the principle of imitation. But we imitate only what we love and admire; and the character of the wise man has in it what alone can command the highest love and admiration of the soul. It has moral beauty—the beauty of the Lord. From this subject we learn—1. That the choice of companions is the most important step in life. 2. That godly literature has an inestimable value. 3. That the Church institution is a most beneficent appointment. (*Homilist.*) *Companionship of the young*:—The subject of companionship and its consequences is one of deep interest and constant application to all stages of life; but it concerns especially the young. There are few matters about which the young should be more careful, and there are few about which many of the young are more careless. Companionship is a human necessity. Man seeks for it by an instinct of his nature, as certainly and irrepressibly as whales go in schools, fish in shoals, cattle in herds, birds in flocks, and bees in hives. Companionship, in itself, is not an evil thing, but a good. But it may be sadly perverted, and thus become bad, and the source and spring of untold badness. Men can turn good to evil. The very best of God's things may be perverted. And men, young and old, have perverted companionship. We are made or marred according to our choice of companions. In Solomon's thought was only the companionship of living men. There is now also a companionship in books, and thus mind with mind. The character of book companionship resembles closely that of living men. In forming human companionships some seem scarcely to exercise any choice at all. They allow themselves to drift. As a rule such persons gravitate towards the bad. Many choose those who, at first meeting, make an agreeable impression on them. The only real basis of true love is the knowledge of personal qualities which command love. You should never make a companion

of one you do not know. The text speaks of possible companionships under two classes—the wise and the foolish. By the “wise” is not meant the “learned”; nor the cute, the clever, the capable man of business. By the “wise” is meant the good, the man who places the spiritual above the material, God over and above self; the man who would rather be right than what is called successful. By “fools” is not meant the intellectually weak and silly; nor the merely thoughtless, the giddy, the frivolous. By “fools” is meant all who are morally and spiritually without God, and thus, openly or secretly, wicked. We are left free to choose our companions from among the wise and the fools. But we are not without guidance. We have reason, and conscience, and the Word and Spirit of God. The results we reap from our companionships will correspond with the choice we make. The reaping mentioned here is the result of the principle of assimilation. The associate of the wise will be assimilated to them. The very choice of the spiritually right and good is an evidence of wisdom at the start. In such fellowship a right and God-pleasing character is built up. The companion of the frivolous and the wicked soon learn their ways, and become conformed to their character. Surely moral contamination is more to be dreaded than physical. You must have a companion. Receive, I beseech you, the best of all—our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (*Alexander Davidson.*) *The importance of avoiding bad and choosing good company:—*

I. WHAT MAY BE MEANT BY WISE MEN AND FOOLS. Not learned men and illiterate men. A wise man is one who proposes to himself the most valuable ends, and pursues them by the best means. A fool is one who either has no worthy ends in view, or does not pursue them by proper means. The prudent is the wise man. The inconsiderate is the fool. The wise man is the true believer and holy soul; and the fool is the impenitent sinner, who rejects Christ and His salvation. **II. WHAT IS IT TO WALK WITH WISE MEN OR FOOLS?** 1. It is to love and choose their company. 2. To seek and frequent their company. 3. To make them our intimate friends, and to fall in with them. **III. THE ADVANTAGES OR DISADVANTAGES OF WALKING WITH WISE MEN OR FOOLS.** As to walking with wise men—1. It is a great part of wisdom to choose such. 2. It is a means of growing wiser. 3. He who really is the companion of the wise will certainly himself be wise. As to walking with fools—1. The companions of fools walk in the way which leads to destruction. 2. They are continually in the utmost danger of destruction. 3. If they continue they shall certainly be destroyed, with them, for ever and ever. (*John Guyse, D.D.*) *Wise companionship:—*Society is in itself so necessary to human life. Adam, in the state of innocence, could not be happy, though in paradise, without a companion. The chief scope of the text may be summed up in this observation: that every man's present and future welfare doth very much depend upon the right choice and improvement of those friends or companions with whom he doth most familiarly converse. For the clearing of this observation, it may be made very evident from divers Scriptures. Upon this account it is that we have such frequent cautions and threats against conversing with bad company. This was the meaning of all those severe prohibitions in the ceremonial law against touching any unclean thing. It is observable, that he who touched a dead beast was unclean but till the evening (Lev. xi. 24), but he who touched a dead man was unclean for seven days (Num. xix. 11), signifying a bad man to be the most dangerous of all other creatures. The apostle styles wicked men to be such as are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. ii. 1) even whilst they live (1 Tim. v. 6.) There are four things wherein most men place their welfare, some or all of which every rational man doth propose to himself in the choice of his friends. These are reputation, safety, comfort, profit. 1. For reputation or honour. Wicked men are fools in the phrase of the text; and what credit can a wise man expect by conversing with fools? On the other side, good men are the excellent of the earth. Such alone are truly noble and magnanimous. And therefore whoever would propose to himself honour and reputation in his society must make choice only of such companions. 2. For safety. The text tells us that a companion of fools shall be destroyed. If any one shall persuade himself that he can enjoy their company, and yet escape their contagion, he may as well think to suspend the natural operation of fire; whereas on the other side, every one fares the better for the company of those that are good. They are the lights of the world, the salt of the earth, the pillars of a nation, those that stand in the gap to prevent an inundation of judgment. Potiphar's house was blessed for Joseph's sake (Gen. xxxix. 5), and all the passengers in the ship were saved from drowning for St. Paul's sake (Acts xxvii. 24). 3. For comfort. This is one of the principal

ends of friendship, to ease and refresh a man amidst the anxieties of life; and there is nothing of greater efficacy to this purpose. But now this cannot be expected from any wicked person; whereas, on the other side, those that are wise in the phrase of the text are the most delightful company that are. 4. And lastly, for profit. There is nothing to be expected from such friends but the increase of our sins and of our punishments; whereas in conversing with those that are good there are these advantages—(1) Their example will by degrees insinuate into the mind, and obtain the force of precepts, exciting us to a holy emulation. (2) Their very presence will affect us with some kind of awe against evil. (3) Their conference, wholesome and savoury, administering grace to the hearers. (4) Their counsel, faithful, and wise, and hearty. (5) Their prayers powerful, ready. And it is not easily imaginable what an advantage that is, to have a praying friend or companion. There are three lessons I would briefly insist upon in the application of it. 1. That we would take notice of the great benefit to be obtained by the right improvement of society and mutual converse with one another. 2. That we of this place would be careful, both for ourselves and those committed to our charge, in the right choice of our friends and company. 3. That we would labour for those proper qualifications and abilities which may render us acceptable and useful in our conversing with others. There are four conditions, amongst many others, that are more especially suitable to this purpose—(1) A readiness to communicate, according to the gifts we have received, so ministering the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (2) Humility. That is a sociable grace, lovely in itself, and acceptable to all. (3) Prudence, in distinguishing of men's tempers, prejudices, infirmities; in discerning of the right seasons and advantages to do good amongst them. (4) Ingenuity and candour of disposition, in owning of our own weaknesses or faults, another's gifts or pre-eminences. (*John Wilkins.*) *The evils of bad company:—* "A man is known by the company that he keeps." The proverb is illustrated by the experience of all ages. I. OF NECESSARY INTERCOURSE WITH THE WICKED. 1. In society and trade. Conversation is permitted in buying, selling, and following out ordinary commercial transactions. 2. We may have intercourse with others for their good. Christ Jesus conversed with sinners to gain them. II. AVOID UNNECESSARY FAMILIARITY. Avoid the sins of the ungodly. If impelled by position, connection, or business to associate, beware of compliance in sin. The nearest tie cannot sanction participation in sin. Many reasons dissuade from undue familiarity. You cannot be familiar and escape contagion. The conversation of the wicked has more power to corrupt than the conversation of the good to ameliorate. These observations are peculiarly addressed to the young whose habits are forming, whose character is moulding. III. SOME CLASSES OF DANGEROUS CHARACTERS TO BE AVOIDED BY THE YOUNG MAN. 1. Beware of the idle. Idleness exposes to all forms of temptation. 2. Beware of the selfish and covetous. There is grave danger that you be affected with this spirit, and your sole determination be by all means to get wealth. Covetousness is a deceitful sin. It leads to innumerable evils. 3. Beware of the loose and erroneous. Those who are neglecting religion. The Sabbath-breaker. Those naturally disposed to error. 4. Beware of those who frequent suspicious places. Choose for companions persons of moral worth, those who fear the Lord. (*Samuel Spence.*) *Companionship with the highest wisdom:—*It is as we contemplate the Divine perfections that our souls are lifted toward the same perfection. The man who moves in cultivated society acquires refined tastes—a high ideal. The eye is educated by the most perfect specimens of art; the ear is educated by the most graceful forms of speech; the manners are formed upon the most elegant models of deportment. Walking in the light, he becomes a child of the light. So with the believer. The coteries of human society may be closed to him. From its select circles he may be hopelessly excluded. But the highest culture of all is open to him in the society of God. He may walk in the supernal light, and form his character upon a Divine model. Communion in the spiritual sphere, as well as in the social, implies assimilation. We become like those we walk with. (*J. Halsey.*) *Godly society improving:—*When General Nicholson lay wounded on his death-bed before Delhi, he dictated this last message to his equally noble and gallant friend, Sir Herbert Edwardes: "Tell him I should have been a better man if I had continued to live with him, and our heavy public duties had not prevented my seeing more of him privately. I was always the better for a residence with him and his wife, however short. Give my love to them both!" (*Christian Weekly.*) *Society operates for*

good or ill :—If we desire to be preserved from sin, let us avoid engaging company ; many persons would resist the force of natural inclination, but when that is excited by the example of others, they are easily vanquished. A pure stream passing through a sink will run thick and muddy. And the “evil communication” will leave some of its corrupting influence to pollute the purest morals. On the contrary, society with the saints is a happy advantage to make us like them. As waters that pass through medicinal minerals do not come out the same waters, but, being impregnated with their properties, they derive a healing tincture from them, so it is impossible to be much with the Lord’s people without imbibing something of their motives and principles, and a desire to be influenced by their spirit. No society can be to us a matter of indifference, but must operate for good or ill. The present world is a continual temptation. We are in a state of warfare ; though not always in fight, yet always in the field, exposed to our spiritual enemies that war against our souls : and our vigilance and care should be accordingly. (*G. H. Salter.*)

Ver. 21. Evil pursueth sinners : but to the righteous good shall be repaid.—*The practice of wickedness generally attended with great evil* :—The practice of righteousness is men’s true interest, even in this present life. Wickedness is generally attended with great misery, even here as well as hereafter. Exceptions must, of course, be made in cases of persecution for truth and righteousness’ sake. 1. Consider mankind in general, under the notion of one universal community. Then the only thing which distinguishes men from wild beasts, with regard to any true happiness of life, is religion, or a sense of the just and right, and of the difference between moral good and evil. Reason, dissociated from moral obligation, only makes men more effectually destroy one another. Reason implying a sense of moral obligation is the secret of happiness in human life. 2. Take a less general view of mankind, in their more restrained political capacity, as formed into particular distinct nations and governments. In this view the only true and lasting happiness depends on the practice of righteousness and true virtue. In proportion as justice, and order, and truth, and fidelity prevail, the happiness of society is secured. 3. Consider men singly, every one in his mere private and personal capacity. Still the only possibility of lasting happiness is the practice of righteousness, charity, temperance, and universal virtue. Illustrate in relation to health ; riches, honour, and reputation ; inward peace and satisfaction in a man’s own mind. Here virtue triumphs absolutely without control, and has no competitor. (*S. Clarke.*) *Sin and its punishment* :—The pursuit is a successful pursuit. The evil not only follows the transgressor, but it lays hold of him at last, and wrings out its penalties. Much sin is committed in spite of the remonstrance of conscience, and with the secret acknowledgments, on the part of the perpetrator, that he is doing wrong, and exposing himself to punishment. These men must have some specific with which they quiet their apprehensions, and procure for themselves an ease in the doing of what they know to be wrong. Direct attention to one form of deceit—the expectation of concealment, and therefore of impunity. It is unquestionably thus in regard of those offences of which human laws take cognisance. And much sin is committed with the secret hope that God will not observe it, or that He will not be extreme to take vengeance. It is false to suppose that any sin will pass without recompense just because Christianity is a system which provides in full measure for its forgiveness. Our redemption through Christ does not at all exempt from the temporal penalties of sin. It so makes future happiness dependent on present holiness that every pardoned sin may be punished with the loss of something glorious in eternity. It is a mistaken objection to Christianity that the arrangements of the Christian system secure a certain class of men against the being pursued and overtaken in their sins, because it takes for granted that forgiven sin must go wholly unpunished. Evil “pursueth” ; that is, hunts the sinner with the greatest pertinacity, tracking him through the various scenes of life, and then, when the man fancies he is safe, suddenly darting upon him, and exacting all the punishment. Illustrate by the vices and follies of youth-time, or by the mere idling away of the early years of life. No sin can ever be committed which is not, in one way or another, punished by God. This is true of sins committed after conversion, as well as before conversion. Then let no man depart and think that he may sin yet one more sin and not eventually be a sufferer. (*Henry Melville, B.D.*) *Destiny following character* :—That retributory justice tracks our footsteps, is a doctrine as old as the race. It grows out of the conscience, and is confirmed by the

experience of mankind. The Nemesis of the heathen, which was a mysterious pursuer of character, was only a personification of the doctrine. Misery grows out of sin, and happiness out of goodness. I. THE LAW OF MORAL CAUSATION SHOWS THIS. Man's character is not the creation of a day or an hour, it is the result of past actions. When no change has taken place, like that of regeneration, the man's character to-day is the result of the whole of his past life, and will be, without such a renovation, the cause of the whole of his future. Character is a fruitful tree, it never ceases bearing, every branch is clustered, but the fruit is either misery or happiness, according to its own vital essence. II. THE CONSTITUTION OF MORAL MIND SHOWS THIS. Moral mind has at least two faculties. 1. One to recall the past. The law of memory compels us to re-live our past lives. 2. One to feel the past. The past does not flit before us as shadows on the wall, as images on the glass, making no impression; it falls on conscience, it stirs it into feeling. The soul is compelled to shudder at a wicked past, whilst a virtuous past fills it with a quiet and ineffable delight. III. THE TEACHING OF HOLY WRIT SHOWS THIS. The Bible assures us that God will render to every man according to his deeds (Josh. vii. 20-26; Matt. xxv.; Rom. ii. 6-10). (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 22. **A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children.**—*The inheritance of a good man's children*:—The happiness of men depends less on their external conditions than on their personal virtues. "A good man is satisfied from himself." The effects of a man's habits are transmitted to his children, and even to their descendants. They derive from his character a sufficient and a permanent inheritance. I. THE INSTRUCTION OF A GOOD MAN IS AN INHERITANCE TO HIS CHILDREN. The habits which a young man acquires under his father's eye are the foundations of his character. Even talents are subordinate to virtues, and good affections are of more importance in human life than the most splendid ornaments of an unprincipled mind. He who adds to good paternal character the principles of liberal knowledge and the views of a liberal mind sends his children into the world with those precious endowments without which the wealth of the rich serves only to render them more conspicuously contemptible or unhappy. Men of the same worth are not equally qualified for the duties of parental tuition, and their children have not the same advantages. But there is a minuteness and an affection in the paternal care of a good man which supplies the lack of many talents. His children venerate his intentions, even where his judgment has failed him. II. THE EXAMPLE OF A GOOD MAN IS AN INHERITANCE TO HIS CHILDREN. The character of a father lies at the foundation of his influence, and the effect of his paternal solicitude depends on it. His habits are his most successful admonitions, and the examples of religion and probity which his children receive from the general tenor of his temper and conduct are his most permanent instructions. If he has convinced his children that he derives his motives and his consolations from the sincerity of his faith, and that he allows no competition to be in his mind betwixt the praise of men and the approbation of God, his example does more to determine their habits than his best instructions. There are certainly defects in all human characters which render our best examples to our children very imperfect. But even habitual errors in a good man are not vices, and defects and infirmities do not prevent the influence of substantial virtues. III. THE CARE AND PROTECTION OF PROVIDENCE ARE AN INHERITANCE TO A GOOD MAN'S CHILDREN. A good man will use his best endeavour to qualify his children for the business and duties of life; but his chief dependence is on Providence. He commits his children to God. His paternal labours are sanctified by prayer. It is an ever-working law that God "shows mercy unto thousands of them that love Him," and to their children after them. The testimony of ages shows that this law has its full effect, and warrants the confidence with which devout men commit their children to God. The influence of God on the circumstances which regulate our lot is real and perpetual, amidst all the irreligion and incredulity of the world. The plan of Providence is not so uniform as to render it certain that the children of good men will be always prosperous. Their own misconduct often determines their conditions; so may errors in their early education; so may the moral discipline which they require. IV. THE KINDNESS OF FAITHFUL MEN IS AN INHERITANCE TO A GOOD MAN'S CHILDREN. Their success in life must in part depend on the assistance and the friendship of other men, and the purposes of Providence in their favour are accomplished by means of those whom God raises up to assist, or to guide them. God selects the instruments of His purpose from all the variety of human characters. Kindness done to the

child of a good man may become the means of transmitting virtue and prosperity through successive generations. Practical conclusions : 1. The indispensable obligation of every father to give to his children the inheritance of the faithful. 2. The children of good men ought anxiously to preserve the moral and religious advantages which they have received from their fathers. 3. Every conscientious man should feel a personal obligation to help in ensuring to the children of good men the inheritance bequeathed to them by their fathers. (*Sir H. M. Wellwood.*) *The advantage of having godly parents* :—What so interesting as children ? Children are pledges of mutual and hallowed affection. Love to children is the source of numberless and unutterable hopes and fears, and pains and pleasures. It is the emblem of Divine compassion. “As a father pitieth his children.” If parents are affected by the condition of children, children are affected by the conduct of parents. We constantly see children, in ways innumerable, suffering for the vices of their ancestors. The fact is undeniable ; and deism has to encounter the same difficulty with revelation. Religion is no more chargeable with it than the course of nature. On the other hand, goodness operates powerfully and beneficially in descent. In the text we have a godly father entailing blessings on his family. I. THE CHARACTER IN QUESTION IS A GOOD MAN. None are good perfectly ; none are good naturally ; some are saved, and God has begun a good work on them. This is the origin of the character ; but what are the features of it ? 1. In a good man we must have piety. 2. We must have sincerity. 3. We must have uniformity. 4. We must have benevolence and beneficence. II. SUCH A GOOD MAN MAY BE FOUND IN CONNECTED LIFE. His religion will improve all those views and feelings that tend to make him social and useful. The Scripture knows nothing of any pre-eminence attaching to celibacy. Though the subject is spoken of in reference to the man, the woman is by no means excluded. To a family, a good mother, no less than a good father, is an invaluable blessing. III. EXAMINE WHAT THE INHERITANCE IS which a good man leaves to his offspring. 1. It comprehends religious instructions. 2. Pious example. 3. It takes in believing prayers. 4. It consists of sanctified substance. 5. The death of a good man is another part of this inheritance. 6. God bears a regard to the descendants of His followers. (*William Jay.*) *The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just.*—*Material wealth* :—I. AS ENTAILED BY THE GOOD AND ALIENATED BY THE EVIL. Here we have it—1. Entailed by the good. “A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children’s children.” It is a characteristic in man that he feels an interest in posterity. This is an indication of the greatness of man’s nature. It is here intimated by Solomon that the good have some special security by which their property shall descend to their children’s children. And truly they have ; and what is it ? The probable goodness of their children’s children. 2. Alienated by the evil. Wickedness, from its very nature, cannot hold property through many generations : the fortunes it inherits must crumble away. II. AS GAINED BY INDUSTRY AND SQUANDERED BY IMPRUDENCE. Every acre of land is full of potential wealth. Skilled industry can make more of one rood of earth than some men can an acre. But it requires even more sense to retain and rightly use property than to get it. (*Homilist.*) *An inheritance that will wear* :—When the renowned Admiral Haddock was dying he begged to see his son, to whom he thus delivered himself—“Notwithstanding my rank in life and public services for so many years, I shall leave you only a small fortune ; but, my dear boy, it is honestly got, and will wear well ; there are no seamen’s wages or provisions in it, nor is there one single penny of dirty money.”

Ver. 23. *Much food is in the tillage of the poor : but there is that is destroyed for want of judgment.*—*The responsibility, cultivation, and harvest of small gifts* :—Palestine was a land of small peasant proprietors, and the institution of the Jubilee was intended to prevent the acquisition of large estates by any Israelite. The consequence, as intended, was a level of modest prosperity. It was “the tillage of the poor,” the careful, diligent husbandry of the man who had only a little patch of land to look after, that filled the storehouses of the Holy Land. Hence the proverb of our text arose. In all work it is true that the bulk of the harvested results are due, not to the large labours of the few, but to the minute, unnoticed toils of the many. Small service is true service, and the aggregate of such produces large crops. Spade husbandry gets most out of the ground. Much may be made of slender gifts, small resources, and limited opportunities if carefully calculated. This text is a message to ordinary, mediocre people, without much ability or influence. I. It teaches THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SMALL GIFTS. It is no mere accident that in our Lord’s

great parable He represents the man with the one talent as the hider of his gift. There is a certain pleasure in the exercise of any kind of gift, be it of body or mind; but when we know that we are but very slightly gifted by Him, there is a temptation to say, "Oh, it does not matter much whether I contribute my share to this, that, or the other work or no. I am but a poor man. My half-crown will make but a small difference in the total. I am possessed of very little leisure. The few minutes that I can spare for individual cultivation, or for benevolent work, will not matter at all. I am only an insignificant unit; nobody pays any attention to my opinion. It does not in the least signify whether I make my influence felt in regard of social, religious, or political questions, and the like. I can leave all that to the more influential men. It is a good deal easier for me to wrap up this talent—which, after all, is only a threepenny-bit, and not a talent—and put it away and do nothing." Yes, but then you forget that there is a great responsibility for the use of the smallest, as there is for the use of the largest, and that although it did not matter very much what you do to anybody but yourself, it matters all the world to you. But then, beside that, my text tells you that it does matter whether the poor man sets himself to make the most of his little patch of ground or not. "There is much food in the tillage of the poor." The slenderly endowed are the immense majority. The great men and wise men and mighty men and wealthy men may be counted by units, but the men that are not very much of anything are to be counted by millions. And unless we can find some stringent law of responsibility that applies to them, the bulk of the human race will be under no obligation to do anything either for God or for their fellows, or for themselves. Let me remind you, too, how the same virtues and excellences can be practised in the administering of the smallest, as in that of the greatest gifts. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." If you do not utilise the capacity possessed you increase the crop of weeds from its uncultivated clods. We never palm off a greater deception on ourselves than when we try to hoodwink conscience by pleading narrow gifts as an excuse for boundless indolence, and to persuade ourselves that if we could do more we should be less inclined to do nothing. All service coming from the same motive and tending to the same end is the same with God. II. But now, note again HOW THERE MUST BE DILIGENT CULTIVATION OF THE SMALL GIFTS. The inventor of this proverb had looked carefully and sympathetically at the way in which the little peasant proprietors worked; and he saw in that a pattern for all life. There will usually be little waste time, and few neglected opportunities of working in the case of the peasant whose subsistence, with that of his family, depends on the diligent and wise cropping of the little patch that does belong to him. And so if you and I have to take our place in the ranks of the two-talented men, the commonplace run of ordinary people, the more reason for us to enlarge our gifts by a sedulous diligence, by a keen look-out for all opportunities of service, and above all by a prayerful dependence upon Him from whom alone comes the power to toil, and who alone gives the increase. The less we are conscious of large gifts the more we should be bowed in dependence on Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, and the more earnestly should we use that slender possession which God may have given us. Industry applied to small natural capacity will do far more than larger power rusted away by sloth. Who are they who have done the most in this world for God and for men? The largely endowed men? "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called." The coral insect is microscopic, but it will build up from the profoundest depth of the ocean a reef against which the whole Pacific may dash in vain. It is the small gifts that, after all, are the important ones. So let us cultivate them the more earnestly, the more humbly we think of our own capacity. "Play well thy part; there all the honour lies." God, who has builded up some of the towering Alps out of mica flakes, builds up His Church out of infinitesimally small particles—slenderly endowed men touched by the consecration of His love. III. Lastly, let me remind you of the HARVEST REAPED FROM THESE SLENDER GIFTS WHEN SEDULOUSLY TILLED. Two great results of such conscientious cultivation and use of small resources and opportunities may be suggested as included in that abundant "food" of which the text speaks. The faithfully used faculty increases. To him that "hath shall be given." "Oh, if I had a wider sphere how I would flame in it, and fill it." Then twinkle your best in your little sphere, and that will bring a wider one some time or other. Fill your place; and if you, like Paul, have borne witness for the Master in little Jerusalem, He will not keep you there, but carry you to bear witness for Him in imperial Rome itself. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.—*The child wisely chastened*:—Under this apparent severity is to be found the spirit of true kindness. It would seem as if the last word in the text were an emphatic word. There is a good deal of chastening, but it is not timely; the will has grown strong, the passions have acquired tenacious hold upon the mind, the chastening comes too late in life. It is the easiest of all things to spare the rod; it enables family life to proceed with fluency; it avoids all controversy and all painful collision as between the elder and the younger. For a time this is beautiful, so much so that people commend the family as one characterised by great harmony and union; on the contrary, it ought to be reprobated. The child that is wisely chastened comes to love the very hand that used the rod. Children must be taught that all things are not theirs, that the world is a place for discipline, and that all life is valuable only in proportion as it has been refined and strengthened by patient endurance. Let no merely cruel man take encouragement from these words to use the rod without measure, and to use it merely for the sake of showing his animal strength. That is not the teaching of the passage. The chastening is to be with measure, is to be timely, is to have some proportion to the offence that is visited, and is to give more pain to the inflicter of the punishment than to its receiver. Great wisdom is required in the use of the rod. The rod has to be used upon every man sooner or later; we cannot escape chastisement: we must be made to feel that the world is not all ours, that there are rights and interests to be respected besides those which we ourselves claim: the sooner that lesson can be instilled into the mind the better; if it can be wrought into the heart and memory of childhood it will save innumerable anxieties and disappointments in all after-life. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The wise use of the rod*:—The rod is to be taken for correction or punishment in general, not specifically for corporal punishment. 1. The rod should be the last resource. The cases in which it is necessary to appeal to the rod are very rare. 2. When the rod is used, be quite sure that a fault has been committed. Children are sometimes severely chastened when they have committed no fault, and this produces a sense of injury and a loss of confidence, which cannot fail to exert evil influences. 3. Let there be a due proportion between the fault and the correction. 4. Never chastise in a passion. 5. Let chastisement be preceded by, or accompanied with, earnest efforts to convince the offender of his fault. 6. Accompany the correction with a system of encouragement. (*R. Wardlaw.*) *The use of the rod*:—Properly treated and fully expanded, this subject of "the stick" would cover all the races of man in all regions and all ages; indeed, it would hide every member of the human family. Attention could be drawn to the respect accorded in every chapter of the world's history, sacred and profane, to the rhabdos—to the fasces of the Roman lictors, which every schoolboy honours (often unconsciously) with an allusion when he says he will lick, or vows he won't be licked—to the herald's staff of Hermes, the caduceus of Mercury, the wand of Æsculapius, the rods of Moses, and the contending sorceress—to the mystic bundle of nine twigs, in honour of the nine muses, that Dr. Bushby loved to wield, and which many a simple English parent believes Solomon, in all his glory, recommended as an element in domestic jurisdiction—to the sacred wands of savage tribes, the staffs of our constables and sheriffs, the highly-polished gold sticks and black rods that hover about the ante-rooms of courts at St. James or Portsoken. The rule of thumb has been said to be the government of this world. And what is this thumb but a short stick, a sceptre emblematic of a sovereign authority which none dares to dispute? "The stick," says the Egyptian proverb "came down from heaven." (*J. Cordy Jeaffreson.*)

Ver. 25. The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul.—*The satisfaction of the body determined by the condition of the soul*:—Bodily satisfaction is an essential element in our happiness so long as we are in this world. The text implies that the satisfaction of the body depends upon the condition of the soul; and this is a great truth greatly neglected. Consider what bodily satisfaction requires. I. **BODILY HEALTH.** No food can satisfy a diseased body, a body whose organs and functions are out of order. But the condition of the soul has much to do with physical health. The anxieties, ill-tempers, recriminations, impure passions of a wicked heart, will soon reduce the body to disease, feebleness, and ruin. On the other hand, a true, virtuous, and happy soul tends to physical health. "A merry heart doeth good like medicine." One thought can dis-

organise a healthy body and do much to restore a diseased one. II. **BODILY SUPPLIES.** The supplies necessary to satisfy the body should be—1. Of a right kind. A body restless with hunger would scarcely be satisfied with confectionery. Now, the condition of the soul has much to do with the kind of food. The soul not only modifies our natural appetites, but creates artificial ones, and hence supplies provisions for the body which are unnatural and unhealthy. The soul, by its working on the body's appetites, has brought to the body's table compounds unsatisfying and deleterious. 2. A right amount. An insufficient amount, even of right provisions, would leave the body unsatisfied. But the question of sufficiency also depends greatly on the soul. Indolence, extravagance, intemperance, bad management, often so reduce men's material resources that they are left utterly destitute of the necessary food. These thoughts, we think, give an important meaning to the text, "The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul: but the belly of the wicked shall want." A corrupt soul will evermore have a dissatisfied body. (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XIV.

VER. 1. Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.—*The wise builder*.—The Scriptures have adapted their instructions to every character and condition in human life. I. **DESCRIBE THE WISE WOMAN.** 1. She must know how to manage with prudence and care the concerns of a family. It is woman's work to "guide the house." How many, on marrying, find they need to learn the first principles of domestic economy. If a man can be more happy in any other house than his own, he is a lost man. 2. A wise woman will improve her taste and her manners. This in no way involves her becoming proud. 3. A wise woman will aim to improve her mind. The mind is enlarged by receiving ideas, and by using them as materials of thought and reasoning. 4. A wise woman will endeavour to enlighten and improve her conscience. This is the faculty of the soul by which we weigh the morality of an action. To improve the conscience we must give it light, and let it guide us. Well enlightened, it guides to happiness and heaven. 5. A wise woman will be particularly careful to cultivate the heart. The instinctive affections are capable of improvement by other means than grace. But the female character is essentially defective in the absence of piety. Religion has a peculiar sweetness when it mingles with the modest softness of the female character. By reason of their peculiar trials, females need the comforts, hopes, and prospects of religion more, if possible, than the other sex. II. **A WISE WOMAN BUILDETH HER HOUSE.** To build her house is to promote the best good of her husband and her offspring. 1. How will such a woman affect their estate? Her wisdom will save more than her hands could earn. 2. She will render her family respectable. 3. She will render her family happy. She will so manage as not to irritate their passions. Her example will breathe through the house a mild and soft atmosphere. There is no resisting the combined influence of so many virtues. What she cannot do by her precepts and examples, she effects by her prayers. Her influence surely extends beyond her own family. Reflections: 1. Females see how they are to rise in the scale of being. 2. See the importance of supporting good schools. 3. See the importance of the gospel. 4. Females should make the Scriptures their daily study. From the mother, rather than the father, the members of the family will take their character. (*D. C. Clark.*) *Wise and foolish wives*.—The foolish woman does not know that she is plucking down her house; she thinks she is building it up. By unwise energy, by self-assertion, by thoughtless speeches, by words flung like firebrands, she is doing unutterable mischief, not only to herself, but to her husband and family. There are, on the other hand, wise women who are quietly and solidly building the house night and day: they make no demonstration; the last characteristic that could be supposed to attach to them would be that of ostentation; they measure the whole day, they number its hours, they apportion its worth; every effort they make is an effort which has been reasoned out before it was begun; every word is looked at before it is uttered; every company is estimated before it is entrusted with confidence. In this way the wise woman consolidates her house. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *House*

wifery.—I. ITS GREAT POWER. 1. It can build up. "Every wise woman buildeth her house." (1) Materially. By her economy, industry, and wise management she increases its material resources. A good wife builds up her house—(2) Spiritually. A good wife by her example, her spirit, her admonitions, her reproofs, her prayers, rears in her house a very temple of industry, intelligence, and worship. 2. It can pull down. "The foolish plucketh it down with her hands." There are women who by their miserable tempers and degrading habits ruin their husbands and children. II. ITS NECESSARY QUALIFICATION. What is the necessary qualification for a good housewife? "Wisdom." (*Homilist*.) *Home made happy by a good wife*.—A plain marble stone, in a churchyard, bears this brief inscription: "She always made home happy." This epitaph was penned by a bereaved husband, after sixty years of wedded life. He might have said of his departed wife, she was beautiful, and accomplished, and an ornament to society, and yet not have said she made home happy. Alas, he might have added, she was a Christian, and not have been able to say, "She always made home happy." What a rare combination of virtues and graces this wife and mother must have possessed! How wisely she must have ordered her house! In what patience she must have possessed her soul! How self-denying she must have been! How tender and loving! How thoughtful for the comfort of all about her! (*Christian Treasury*.)

Ver. 2. He that walketh in his uprightness feareth the Lord.—*Human conduct*.—I. MEN DIFFER WIDELY IN THEIR DAILY CONDUCT. 1. Some men walk uprightly. Walking uprightly implies—(1) Moral strength. The man is not bent and crooked by the infirmities of sin or the weight of depravity. (2) Conscious rectitude. He does not bow down his head, as if ashamed to look his neighbour in the face. He is as open as the day, and as fearless as the sun. 2. Some walk perversely. "They are perverse in their ways." They are crooked in their purposes, policies, and performances. II. MEN REVEAL THEIR HEART TOWARDS GOD IN THEIR DAILY WALK. 1. Right conduct springs from a right feeling towards God. The man that walketh uprightly feareth the Lord. There is no true morality without religion. Piety is the first principle of all rectitude. All good living must have respect to God. 2. Wrong conduct springs from wrong feeling towards God. "He that is perverse in his ways, despiseth Him." The wrong doer has no feeling of respect for God. He ignores Him as much as he can. You may know how men feel inwardly toward their Maker by observing how they deal outwardly with each other. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Where no oxen are, the crib is clean: but much increase is by the strength of the ox.—*The law of increase*.—The illustration is drawn from husbandry, and in a country like Palestine, where the ox had such an important place in agricultural operations, it was peculiarly intelligible and peculiarly fit. "Where is the farmer," says the wise man, "who, in order to preserve tidiness in his stalls, would forego the assistance of oxen in his fields?" Something he might secure, no doubt; a rack unsoiled by the oxen's fodder, a floor unmarked by the oxen's hoofs, the absence of disorder that offends the eye, the freedom from task-work that tires the arm, with whatsoever satisfaction such immunity affords. Yes, but what does he lose? Almost all that makes his property profitable, almost all that makes his stackyard full. What of the ploughing of the land? What of the carrying home of the sheaves? What of the treading out of the corn? "Where no cattle are, the crib is clean." True. But what of that? Is the cleanness worth considering, in comparison with the increase that comes by the strength of the ox? And now, I think, we have hold of the principle. There is no good to be got without its accompanying drawbacks; let the drawbacks and the good be weighed carefully together, and if the good outbalance the drawbacks, then let the good be chosen and the drawbacks faced with resolution, intelligence, and cheerfulness. Sentiment is right in its place, fastidiousness is proper in its season; but sentiment is worse than idle, fastidiousness is worse than false, when we permit them to stand between us and a substantial good, the good that Providence intends us to get or the good that Providence commands us to do. I. We might begin with an illustration from the INDUSTRIAL sphere, the relation, namely, between manufacture and natural scenery. Where no manufacture is, the scenery is intact; but much increase comes by the processes of manufacture. Take, for example, the midland counties of England, and especially those parts of them we know as the Black Country. No region of England is more picturesque

in itself, marked by the outlines and stored with the elements of natural and original beauty. Yet how man has overlaid and defaced things! Look at the country as it is now, ploughed with railway tracks, torn with excavations, encumbered with heaps of rubbish. And those to whom beauty is all may object to this. "What barbarism," they say, "what vandalism, what wanton and wilful desecration of the sanctities of nature! Better, surely, was the country in its virgin luxuriance, when the slopes were clothed with woodland." Well, the change means loss, no doubt, loss from the standpoint of the beauty-lover. But it means gain from the standpoint of the utilitarian, and gain, too, in the eye of those who look higher than what is merely utilitarian. For not only does black smoke, according to the proverb, make white silver, but it is a witness to facts, a testimony to realities, of which silver is only a single embodiment, and that, too, by no means the highest. The sight was a symbol of several things, all noble and honourable in their way. It is a symbol of man's power over nature, his diligence in extracting and his ingenuity in moulding the substance which nature conceals in her heart. It is a symbol of the clothing that covers shivering forms, a symbol of the bread that feeds hungry mouths. It is a symbol of England's greatness, industry, and world-wide trade.

II. Passing from the industrial to the domestic sphere, we might select an illustration of a different character, which a poet-preacher of the time has happily associated with this text, and speak of the relation between children and home. We remark, then, that where there are no children, the house may be trim; but much profit comes through the presence and companionship of children. Neatness in a house may be good. But there is a neatness that tells of emptiness. There is a neatness that betokens loneliness. There is a neatness that is not half so attractive as the wear and tear, the disturbance and disorder, that denote the presence of busy little inmates, with their restless hands and roving feet. The loss is a small one compared with the gain. Children are God's heritage. How much they teach! How much they bestow! Not only does the parent train and develop the child, but the child may train and develop the parent. Our children should be leaders to all of us, leaders from faithlessness into faith, from restlessness into rest, from selfishness into sacrifice, from frivolity into earnestness, thoughtfulness, and the sense of responsibility. Does not the pure eye of an innocent child restrain the foul or the cruel act? Are not its needs a discipline in sympathy, its questionings a training in reflection? Where the children are absent, the home may be neat, the mind unperplexed; but much increase—increase of happiness, increase of affection, increase of prosperity—comes through association with little children.

III. Or we might pass to the ECCLESIASTICAL sphere, and select as an instance of the same principle the relation between controversy and the Church. We note, then, at this point, that where no discussion is, the Church may be at rest; but much benefit comes through freedom of discussion, in the case of the Church as well as of the State. Some people are all for peace. But there is a peace of stagnation. There is a peace of indifference. There is a peace that is based upon lack of conviction. Do not judge of Church enterprises nor of Church proceedings, as some do, and condemn them simply because they create dispeace. Peace may be bought too dearly. Purity is better. Truth is better. Undoubtedly in discussion the crib may be soiled. Controversy often awakens temper, evokes party spirit, causes hard words to be said, unkind acts to be done, selfish rivalries to spring up. Yet these may be a blessing in the end, in comparison of which the temporary soiling of the crib is a matter of smaller importance after all. There is the down-breaking of prejudice. There is the removing of misunderstandings. There is the formulating of principle. There is the discovering of character. It will be best for the spread of righteousness; it will be safest in the interests of belief.

IV. Pass next to the sphere of PRACTICAL BENEFICENCE, and apply the principle of the text to the relation between philanthropy and experience. We remark, then, that where no philanthropy is, the experience may be easy, free from much that is unpleasant to look at, unpleasant to think of, and unpleasant to do; but much increase comes through the exercise of philanthropy. What have we here but the plain, simple lesson, which has to be learnt by every social benefactor, every Christian worker, that they who will live helpfully, as the saviours and the succourers of their fellow-men, must be prepared to forego fastidiousness. To do any real good amidst the poor, the sunken, and the vicious, men must come into contact with many things that are neither pleasant nor pure. Now, take any such labourer as these, in the great unselfishness, the overflowing charity, the fearlessness of mind and of heart,

which the labour engaged in always demands. And take another, to whom labour of the time is unknown, one who, with the same possibilities and the same call, says, "No, the task you propose is distasteful, the experiences you prescribe are rough; I prefer to have my sight unoffended, my feelings unharrowed, my imagination unhaunted. Let me see to myself—the purity of my own character, the health and prosperity of my own soul, in the circle of my personal friendships, the seclusion of my private home." Put the two side by side. Which leads the richer existence? Each has its own reward. How shall we best explain these rewards, their distinctive nature, their relative value? Just in the terms of the text. For the one, the "clean crib"—a certain ignorance, a certain immunity, certain security; not only a sensibility unwrung by the spectacles of sorrow, but a mind kept closed to the pictures of sin: that, and perhaps little more than that. For the other, the "much increase," in the enriching of his personal character, the widening of his personal sympathies, together with the privilege of ministering to his brethren's welfare and the joy of being blessed to his brethren's souls. Clean garments, clean hands, who set a value upon these, as the continuous, the indispensable prerequisite of life? I will tell you who do not. Not the surgeon, as he walks the battlefield with the sponge that wipes the blood and the linen that binds the wounds. Not the rescue party, as they enter the mine, amidst the heat, the soot, and the smoke of a recent explosion, with which the caverns still echo, and the earth still smokes. Not the sailor, as he pulls to the wreck, through a troubled sea that casts up mire and dirt, till his arms are twined with the seaweed and his coat is drenched with the ooze. Clean hands and clean garments, you must be content now and then to forego them, if the world you live in is to be cleansed. V. Akin to the last thought is another one, drawn this time from the MENTAL sphere. Take the relation between force of character and life. We remark, then, in the last place, that where there is no force of character, the life may be inoffensive, harmless in itself, pleasing to others; but much increase, increase to the world and the Church, comes through force of character. Most men have the defects of their qualities. This is especially true of those whose distinguishing quality is vigour, a certain superabounding energy and strength. The vigour is apt to be domineering, the energy rude, the strength unaccompanied with suavity, fine feeling, good taste. If you are to reap the advantage of such characters, you take them as you find them, and pardon and tolerate their coarseness that you may be helped and benefited by their zeal. Luther was earnest but rough. But we remember the work. We remember the time. Neither the period nor the task admitted of treatment by rosewater. What though the crib was untidy? Be thankful for the well-ploughed field; be thankful for the gathered sheaves of religious truth and religious liberty, which still remain in our storehouses, to give seed to the Christian sower and bread to the Christian eater, as the outcome of Luther's labours, the memorial of Luther's name. Take God's blessing as it comes to you, and be very tolerant towards the instruments. Polish is a less thing than enthusiasm, courtliness than sincerity. It may be well to have both things combined. But if we are shut up to the alternative, and feel tempted to pronounce for the softer qualities, as less likely to irritate, less apt to excite, let us fall back on the principle of the text, and while remembering that where no force of character is the life may be inoffensive, much increase comes by the vigour we fear. (*W. A. Gray.*) *Where no oxen are, the crib is clean:*—I. Taken in its primary sense, it CONVEYS A LESSON OF NO SMALL IMPORTANCE TO THE MERE CULTIVATOR OF LAND. You pride yourself upon the exquisite neatness and order of your farm. The spade, the plough, the fork, the cart, are almost as pure and delicate as when they came from the hands of the maker. But if the work is left undone, and you purchase neatness and order at the expense of having no sheep in the fold, then you pay too dear for your nicety; you have the clean crib, but you will have also an empty barn. II. The same maxim APPLIES TO THE MANAGEMENT OF A HOUSE. You pride yourself on the exquisite neatness of every corner in your dwelling-place. Not a cobweb is on the ceiling, and not a grain of dust on the staircase. The delighted mistress has the daily satisfaction of seeing her own fair face reflected in the polished table below her. The crib is clean; but you may here also buy the cleanliness at too high a price. Perhaps cleanliness is not merely your taste but your idol. You forget that usefulness is the true object of household economy, and that neatness is a mere means to this end. You, like Mr. Burke's man of honour, "feel a stain like a wound," and esteem a hole in a carpet as tantamount to a hole in your character. You forget that your house was not designed

by the great Giver for yourself alone, but for your neighbours and friends, for brothers and sisters, and nephews and nieces, who want a little country air or London shopping, and who naturally look to you, as to a richer relation and friend, to give them the convenience they need. Surely you had better have a soiled "crib" than a narrow heart; and spotted tables than not a single loving, grateful, happy guest to sit at a clean one. III. This rule is also applicable, I think, to LITERATURE. The correctness of some writers is perfectly unimpeachable. The grammarian searches in vain for a false concord or quantity, or the rhetorician for a false ornament. There is no confusion of metaphor; no redundancy of expression which disfigures the pages of less cautious writers. Now here the "crib" is clean; but then, in such cases, it is often equally true that there are no "oxen." The style is as "dull, cold, flat, and unprofitable," as it is pure and correct. It is the judgment of a no less critic than Quintilian, that the writer who, in his youth, is never redundant, will usually in his old age be poverty stricken. Where the heart, the imagination, and the passions have free play, the critic may find something to correct; but very often also consciences will be touched and hearts be edified. IV. But I now turn to SOME HIGHER TOPICS, TO WHICH THE RULE APPEARS TO ME EQUALLY TO APPLY. Lenis is a most unexceptionable person; of the very calmest temper and the most placid manners. He is always to be found in the right place at the very right moment. He speaks little, and never offensively; he belongs to no party, and is a determined enemy to all excess. He is perhaps constant at church, though a little drowsy there; has a decided preference for vague, calm, general sermons. He gives decently to all popular or uncriticised charities. And the result of all this is, that he gets into no scrapes, incurs no reproach, is claimed as a friend by men of all opinions, simply because he was never known to express an opinion of his own. Now here "the crib" is unusually "clean." But at what expense is it purchased? I should say at the cost of most of the feelings, tastes, principles, rules, habits, and sympathies which constitute the substance and essence of the Christian character. The "crib is clean" because there are "no oxen." Lenis is as much like a statue as a man. All the higher and nobler passions of our nature have no place in him. His life is, possibly, harmless, but it is altogether unprofitable. And this because the one essential quality is wanting, the love of God, and the love of His family upon earth. He might be nearly all he is if there were no such Being as the Redeemer of the world, who had felt for him, and expected him to feel for others. The same thought may be extended to different classes of the ministers of religion. I remember to have seen, some years since, in a review of high authority, a comparison drawn between Bishop—— as a parochial minister, and Thomas Scott as the minister of Olney. The bishop, on quitting his parish for another sphere of duty, finds little but subjects of self-complacency, commendation, and thankfulness. The whole population might seem to have received the whole word of truth into their souls. Every plan had prospered. "The crib is clean." Mr. Scott, on the contrary, in quitting his parish, speaks strongly of the immorality of one part of the population, of the stubbornness and self-will of another, and of the abuse of the doctrines of grace in a third party. And whilst he dwells strongly, and gratefully, on the zeal, love, and fidelity of some, his language is certainly, on the whole, such as might be expected from the mourning prophet, when "rivers of water ran down his eyes because men kept not the word" of the Lord. Here, therefore, "the crib" was, to appearance, not equally "clean." But then I am disposed to think that the "oxen" were far more diligently at work in the one case than in the other. The object of the one minister was mainly to secure order, regularity, decency, harmony, with a decent regard for morals and religion. The object of the other was to "lay the axe to the root of the tree"—to convince, to alarm, to convert, to sanctify, to lead his hearers as contrite sinners to the foot of the Cross, and to qualify them under God for the highest seats in the kingdom of heaven. And the result was that, in the one case, few consciences were touched, few fears were awakened, few hearts were moved. In the other case, if there were some who were offended at plain truths announced in the somewhat homely language of the minister, there were also many awakened consciences. V. The last case to which I shall refer the proverb is that of CONTROVERSY. Eirenos is a man of peace. He can quote to you maxims without number from the Scriptures and from the writings of great theologians on the duty of gentleness, forbearance, charity. If you wish to enlist him on the side of those who are doing battle for some vital truth, he comes down upon you with a deluge of authorities which it is almost

impossible to resist; tells you that Fénelon wrote a whole treatise upon "Charity"; that Bishop Hall was the author of a treatise expressly denominated "The Olive Branch"; that Hooker said the time would come when "a few words written in charity" would be worth all the angry disputation in the world. Now all this is true; and is, indeed, never to be forgotten by the disciples of a compassionate Saviour. A higher authority than any of these uninspired writers says: "If I give my body to be burned and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." But it may be well to remind Eirenos that, notwithstanding the peaceful spirit and language of all these authorities, Fénelon barely escaped burning for the honesty and explicitness with which he spoke his mind; Bishop Hall was for the same offence driven out of his diocese; Hooker was charged with all sorts of enormities before the Privy Council; and St. Paul himself was hunted down like a wild beast by all classes of the community. But Eirenos has no taste for such extravagances. Now here is the "clean crib," but where are the "oxen"? Here is Erasmus; but where is Luther, or Cranmer, or Ridley, or Latimer? Where are the zeal, the "indignation" at error, the "vehemence" of holy love, the devotion to God and to truth, which consumed the soul of the meek and lowly Saviour; which exiled St. John to Patmos; and which has lighted up the funeral pile of the whole army of saints and martyrs? (*Christian Observer.*)

Ver. 5. A faithful witness will not lie.—*A true witness*:—Truth is beautiful, as well as safe and mighty. In the incident related below a boy twelve years old, with only truth as a weapon, conquered a smart and shrewd lawyer, who was fighting for a bad cause. "Truth is the highest thing that man may keep," and the noblest child or man is he that keeps the truth ever between his lips. Walter was the important witness in a lawsuit. One of the lawyers, after cross-questioning him severely, said, "Your father has been talking to you and telling you how to testify, hasn't he?" "Yes," said the boy. "Now," said the lawyer, "just tell us how your father told you to testify." "Well," said the boy modestly, "father told me that the lawyers would try and tangle me in my testimony; but if I would just be careful and tell the truth, I could tell the same thing every time." The lawyer didn't try to tangle that boy any more. (*The Fireside News.*) *Falsehood and flaw*:—What a flaw is in steel, what a foreign substance is in any texture, that a falsehood is to the character, a source of weakness, a point where under strain it may break. (*Newman Smyth.*)

Ver. 6. A scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not.—*Secularism*:—It is the constant profession of those who reject the Bible that they are seeking truth. They seek wisdom and do not find it. They want the first qualification of a philosopher, a humble and teachable spirit. There is a race of men amongst us at the present day who scorn bitterly faith's meek submission to God's revealed will. They desire to be free from authority. The divinity, as they phrase it, is in every man. If men really were independent beings, it would be right to assert and proclaim their independence. But the problem for man is, not to reject all masters, but to accept the rightful one. Those who scorn the wisdom from above seek laboriously for the wisdom that is beneath. The name "secularist" is adopted to indicate that they appreciate and study the knowledge that concerns the present world, and repudiate as unattainable or useless all knowledge that pertains to another. "Secularism" is Latin for "this-world-ism." Before we adopt this philosophy we must be sure that there is immortality for man. If there is another world, our course here will affect our condition there. It is by faith in the unseen that men steer through the shifting sea of time. Cut us off from the future, and you have left the ship without a chart, and without a store; without a compass to steer by, and without a harbour to steer for; you have left the ship an aimless, meaningless, log lying on the water, to be tossed up and down by the waves, and driven hither and thither by the winds, until it fall asunder or sink unseen. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The proud and scornful incapable of attaining wisdom*:—I. **THE CHARACTER OF A SCORNER.** The following ingredients in it: 1. Pride. An undue desire of honour, or an overvaluing one's self, and undervaluing of others. It is the source of undutiful behaviour towards God. It is discovered by affecting a pre-eminence above their fellows. Some claim honour on account of their actual knowledge or their capacity of investigating and discerning truth. To some religion is itself the subject of glorying and vain elation of mind. 2. Contempt of religion and virtue (2 Pet. iii. 3, 4). II. **THE OBSTRUCTION WHICH ARISES FROM SCORNING TO MEN'S**

BECOMING WISE. 1. Pride is a great hindrance both to the attainment of knowledge and virtue. Especially is the man who is proud of his wisdom and his religion the farthest off from becoming truly wise and religious. 2. This perverse disposition rendereth men obnoxious to the displeasure of God, and entirely disqualified for receiving favour from Him. Only application is to exhort you to humility, as a most necessary qualification for your increase in useful knowledge, and in every Christian virtue. There may be mistaken notions of humility. It is far from consisting in any such sentiments as disparage human nature, or any such temper and behaviour as are unworthy its dignity. We must not degrade ourselves into a lower species that we may be humble men. With respect to God, it consists in a just sense of our own subjection and dependence, of our own weakness and guilt. This disposition will entitle us to the favour of God and the approbation of all good men. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *A scorner incapable of true wisdom:—I. WHO IS REPRESENTED HERE UNDER THE CHARACTER OF SCORNER?* Scorners were men who, with much ado, had made a shift to get rid of good principles, and such stiff opinions as they found inconsistent with a loose practice. As they had not any religion themselves, so their way was to despise those who had. The scorner is said to “seek wisdom” and “not to find it.” He pretends to know more, to have made freer inquiries after truth, and to have shaken off the prejudices of education more thoroughly than other people. II. *IN WHAT SENSE HE CANNOT FIND WISDOM.* Four things unfit such a man for impartial inquiries after Divine truth—a very proud, or a very suspicious temper, false wit, or sensuality. The two last generally belong to him; but the two first are essential to him, and inseparable from him. There is no quality that sticks more closely to a scorner than pride, and nothing more evidently obstructs right reasoning. Suspicion makes him doubt everything he hears and distrust every man he converses with. An extremity of suspicion in an inquirer after truth is like a raging jealousy in a husband or a friend; it leads a man to turn all his thoughts towards the ill-natured side, and to put the worst construction upon everything. False wit is a way of exposing things sacred and serious, by passing a bold jest upon them and ridiculing arguments instead of comforting them. The sensual man is, of all men living, the most improper for inquiries after truth and the least at leisure for it. He is never sedate and cool, disinterested and impartial. (*Bp. Atterbury.*)

Ver. 7. *Go from the presence of a foolish man.—The society to be shunned:—*Man is a social being. The text holds up the society which we should avoid—the society of the foolish. I. *IT IS UNPROFITABLE.* What you want in society is knowledge. True knowledge shall—1. Rightly guide. 2. Truly comfort. 3. Religiously inspire the soul. But such knowledge is not to be got from the foolish man. He has no power to help you, and therefore time spent in his society is waste. II. *IT IS MISLEADING.* “The folly of fools is deceit.” 1. They cheat themselves. They fancy they have the true ideas, and the true pleasures, but it is a miserable delusion. 2. They cheat others. They mislead by the falsehood of their speech and the craftiness of their policy. 3. It is wicked. They “make a mock at sin.” “Go,” then, “from the presence of a foolish man.” Seek the society of the wise. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Safety in flight:—*It is the intention of their Maker that some creatures should seek safety, not in fighting, but in fleeing. In the moral conflict of human life it is of great importance to judge rightly when we should fight and when we should flee. The weak might escape if they knew their own weakness, and kept out of harm’s way. That courage is not a virtue which carries the feeble into the lion’s jaws. To go in among the foolish for the rescue of the sinking may be necessary, but it is dangerous work, and demands robust workmen. Your first duty is your own safety. But on some persons at some times there lies the obligation to encounter danger for the safety of a neighbour. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. *Fools make a mock at sin.—Thinking lightly of sin:—*Breathing an atmosphere tainted with moral evil, seeing and hearing sin in our daily walks, we are in no small danger of overlooking its malignity. The word “sin” is to many obscure. It is seldom used in common life. It belongs to theology and the pulpit. According to Scripture there is nothing so evil, so deformed, so ruinous, as sin. To do wrong is more pernicious than to incur all the calamities which nature or human malice can heap upon us. Sin, violated duty, the evil of the heart, this is the only evil of which Scripture takes account. It was from this that Christ came to redeem us. Scripture leads us to connect with sin or wrong-doing the ideas of

evil, wretchedness, and debasement, more strongly than with anything else. I. OUR NATURES TESTIFY THAT SIN IS THE CHIEF OF EVILS. Evil has various forms, these set in two divisions, natural and moral; pain or suffering springing from outward conduct and events, independent of our will: and evil related to character and conduct, and inspired by the will. Vice is manifestly more to be dreaded than pain. All will agree that excellence of character is the supreme good, and that baseness of soul and of action involves something worse than suffering. Our very nature teaches the doctrine of Christianity, that sin or moral evil ought of all evils to inspire most abhorrence and fear. II. EXPERIENCE TESTIFIES THAT SIN IS THE CHIEF OF EVILS. Though sin sometimes prospers, and never meets its full retribution on earth, yet, on the whole, it produces more present suffering than all things else; so that experience warns us against sin or wrong-doing as the chief evil we can incur. To do wrong is to inflict the surest injury on our own peace. III. THE MISERIES OF DISOBEDIENCE TO CONSCIENCE AND GOD ARE NOT EXHAUSTED IN THIS LIFE. Sin deserves, calls for, and will bring down, future, greater misery. This Christianity, and this nature, teaches. Some, indeed, assert that punishment is confined to the present state; that in changing worlds we shall change our characters, and that moral evil is to be buried with the body in the grave. But to suppose no connection to exist between the present and the future character is to take away the use of the present state. It is even plainly implied in Scripture, that we shall suffer much more from sin, evil tempers, irreligion, in the future world, than we suffer here. I have spoken of the pains and penalties of moral evil or of wrong-doing, in the world to come. How long they will endure I know not. (*W. E. Channing, D.D.*) *The danger of making light of sin*:—I. THE FOOLISHNESS IN ITSELF. Sin is really a very terrible thing: nothing is so terrible. Ask its slave and its victim. If you look from its work within you to its work around you, is the foolishness much less manifest? What but sin is the cause of all the misery around us? II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MOCKING AT SIN. 1. The effects of this mocking on the mocker himself. Nothing can be so deadening to the soul. Because laughing at sin relieves us of fear of it. Such mocking is altogether alien from, and contrary to, the mind of Christ. Moreover, it must quench the Spirit. It must kill the first beginnings of repentance. 2. Consequences upon others. There is nothing more corrupting of others than this mocking at sin. Such men may be found doing their deadly work everywhere, and in every rank of society. The young are their peculiar victims. The mocker's work is often irretrievable. No one who has led another to laugh at sin can ever calculate or undo the work he may have done. Learn—1. To fly from the very first beginnings of this sin, whether in yourself or in others. 2. Understand the real value of that in which you are tempted to join. 3. If you are tempted to envy sinners their laugh, or to shrink from their mockeries, seek the defence, relief, and strengthening of prayer. (*Bishop S. Wilberforce.*) *Mockers at sin*:—Of two kinds. Those who ridicule all fear of offending God. Those who will not go this length, but make sins matters of jest rather than of conscience. I. WHAT SIN IS. The transgression of a reasonable, holy, and righteous law. II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF MAKING A MOCK AT SIN. The general consequence of this practice must be the prevailing of sin and unrighteousness in the world. The passions of mankind lead them by a strong propensity to what is forbidden, and all the fences and guards of religion are found little enough to restrain our compliance. Whatever weakens these restraints must, in the same proportion, occasion the increase of all ungodliness. What can more effectually contribute to this evil than making a mock at sin? The natural reluctances of reason and conscience will generally guard men against open scoffers, who ridicule all fear of God, all restraints of virtue and religion. But there are other mockers, whose influence is more to be feared. Men who will permit you to keep a reserve of religion, will pretend to agree with you in detesting some crimes, but persuade you to think others only ludicrous amusements, which it is weakness and superstition to abstain from yourselves, and a morose, unconvertible severity to censure in your neighbours. This is a temptation to which we are exceedingly open. How much we are obliged in duty, and concerned in interest, to correct and oppose this vain, irreligious humour of mocking at sin! To check this growing evil, let us reflect on that holy and dreadful presence before whom we stand. The eyes of our Judge are always over us. (*J. Rogers, D.D.*) *Mocking at sin*:—Sin may briefly be described as the wilful violation of the moral law of God, made known to us in conscience and in revelation. Describe some of the forms under which men evidence their mocking contempt of the power and design of sin. To

the grossest phases of this sin we need scarcely do more than allude. Against the more specious forms of this sin there is need of warning. 1. A man may, without directly denying the evil of sin, yet treat it with most unseemly levity. 2. Some men are in the habit of speaking of sin, that is, of the popular and less flagrant kinds of sin, as being indeed, in a modified sense, an evil; but as one which is inherent in, and inseparable from, humanity, which must therefore be submitted to in part, as a man would endure the enforced society of a disagreeable companion, whom circumstances would not permit him to discard. 3. Men mock at sin when they bear false witness concerning the fruits and effects of sin in themselves and others. If sin be a man's worst enemy, and a very powerful and malignant enemy, he who should mock at it, and deride it, must be acting the part of a vain, senseless, and presumptuous braggart. No man can really believe sin to be a matter for laughter. From all irreverence, and all unholy mirth in relation to sin, may God deliver us! (*G. W. Brameld, M.A.*)

The folly of mocking at sin.—I. WHAT IS IT TO MOCK AT SIN? Sin is the transgression of the law; doing what God forbids, or omitting to do what He commands. The term "mock," as applied to the law of God, may include ridiculing, trifling with its authority and sanctions, or palliating and excusing the breach of it. 1. There are some who scoff, openly profane, and set at defiance the law of God. Of these there are two classes, the one urged by their sensual appetites, the other by their intellectual pride. There are others who see the necessity of a certain attention to moral conduct, but look with a sullen, contemptuous, sceptical eye upon revelation. 2. There are some who mock at sin by "trifling" with it. They suffer almost anything to set aside obedience to God; they expose themselves unnecessarily to temptation; they frequent companies and places, involve themselves in employments, which are likely to lead them to sin, and yet mock at the idea of danger from them. They do not give the law of God, in reference to the regulation of their daily conduct, a thought either one way or the other. 3. There are others who may be said to mock at sin by "excusing and palliating it." They contend that there is more good than evil in the world. They think the gospel dispensation has lowered the requirements of the law. II. THE FOLLY OF SUCH MOCKERS. What justifies ridicule, trifling, and palliation, and does this apply to sin? 1. We ridicule what it is beneath argument to confute. Ridicule is, at all times, a dangerous weapon, seldom befitting the spirit of a real Christian. Absurdity is the object of ridicule. But what is there of absurdity connected with the law of God, that we should laugh at the breach of it? There is something more specious in the mockery of intellectual pride at the transgression of God's law; because we are, from the depravity of our nature, less susceptible of the enormity of spiritual sins than of sins of the flesh. Ambition and pride, for instance, with the world give a dignity to the character, where drunkenness would excite disgust. 2. Where is the sense, or wisdom, of trifling with sin? Has the breach, or observance, of God's law so little to do with our happiness or misery, as really to be scarcely worth our serious attention? Are the consequences of sin unimportant? 3. The folly of excusing or palliating sin is no less manifest. It lessens the abhorrence of sin in our mind. By having low views of sin, we adopt low standards of duty, low aims at usefulness, low views of the holiness of God. To palliate sin is to destroy the harmony of the Divine attributes, to rob Christ of His glory, Christianity of its motives, and to beguile us into a fatal neglect, or even denial of its fundamental doctrines. By palliating sin we also encourage the commission of sin in others; as many a parent has found by bitter experience, in screening children from proper correction, from a foolish regard to the feelings of the moment. When shall we learn that every deviation from the will of God is a loss of happiness? (*B. E. Nicholls, M.A.*)

The fool and his sport.—A man may be a fool in two ways: by knowing too little, or too much. I. THE FOOL. Every wicked man is a fool. See this by comparing their properties. 1. It is a fool's property to have no foresight of future things. 2. To affect things hurtful to himself. 3. To prefer trifles and toys before matters of worth and weight. The fool will not give his bauble for the king's exchequer. Illustrate by the prodigal son. 4. To run on his course with precipitation. As these fools are many, so they are of many kinds. There is the sad fool and the glad fool, the haughty fool and the naughty fool. II. THE SPORT OF THE FOOL. The fathers call "making a mock at sin," the lowest degree of sin, and the very threshold of hell. Consider the object of the fool's sport—sin. 1. Sin, which is contrary to goodness, and though to man's corrupt nature pleasing, yet even abhorred of those sparks and cinders which the rust of sin hath not quite eaten

out of our nature as the creation left it. It is a contra-natural thing to "make a mock at sin." 2. Sin, which sensibly brings on present judgments. 3. Sin, which, if it bring not present judgments, is the more fearful. The less punishment wickedness receives here, the more is behind. 4. Sin, that shall at last be laid heavy on the conscience. 5. Sin, which provokes God to anger. 6. Sin, which God so loathed that He could not serve His own elect because of it, but by killing His own Son. 7. Sin, that shall be punished by death—the second death. But I cease urging this terror, and would rather persuade you by the love of God. (T. Adams.)

The folly of mocking at sin.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY MAKING A MOCK AT SIN. There are three sorts of sinners who, in their several degrees, may justly be charged with this guilt. 1. Those who esteem it a piece of courage to despise all religion, and a greatness of mind to deride all the obligations of virtue. 2. Those who do not in words, but do in deeds, bring contempt upon religion. This practical insult upon religion; this contempt of virtue and goodness in men's lives and actions is really, in the sight of God, a making a mock at sin. 3. Entertaining so slight an opinion of the evil and danger of sin, as makes men who are not entirely profligate, yet content themselves with distant resolutions of future repentance, and in the meantime speak peace to themselves in the practice of unrighteousness, or in the enjoyment of unlawful pleasures. II. UPON WHAT GROUNDS OR REASONS MEN ARE TEMPTED TO BE GUILTY OF THE SEVERAL DEGREES OF THIS VICE. 1. As to those profane spirits who esteem it a mark of courage to despise all religion, the only ground these have to go upon is atheism and infidelity. The only foundation this kind of mockers build upon is the hope that there will be no future state, no judgment to come. 2. Those who pretend to believe a God, and yet live viciously, flatter themselves with a notion that sin is not of so dangerous a nature as the preachers of the gospel represent it to be. 3. Those who are really sensible of the necessity of true repentance and amendment, and yet at the present speak peace to themselves in the practice of unrighteousness, can only find a foundation in an artificial design of securing to themselves both worlds, and of ingrossing more happiness than either God or Nature designed them. This is a mocking of God, but more truly a mocking or deceiving of themselves. III. HOW WEAK ALL THOSE GROUNDS REALLY ARE, AND HOW GREAT IS THE FOLLY OF ACTING ON THEM. As to the first kind of profane mockers, what is the state of such persons when God takes away their soul? Can they be sure there is no God, and no future state? The hardest unbeliever never yet pretended to have demonstration in this case. As to the second kind, those who make profession, but live viciously, on a general expectation that sin is less dangerous, and God more merciful than is usually represented. God is not in the least likely to be imposed upon by an outward profession of service, which even an earthly superior would with indignation reject. As to the third kind, those who indulge at present, with promise to themselves of amendment by and by; it may be said that this folly is playing with death and sporting with destruction. It is the folly of letting slip opportunities which may never be retrieved. It is the folly of provoking God to cut us off in His wrath. It is the folly of incapacitating a man's self more and more for the doing of that which yet is of absolute necessity not to be left undone. The longer any man continues in sin, the more difficult it becomes for him to leave it off. He grows hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. (S. Clarke, D.D.)

The evil of sin.—I. IN ITS NATURE. Its evil is most strikingly represented by contrasting it with the character of God, against whom it is committed; and with the law of God, of which it is the transgression. 1. God is a Being of the most perfect excellence, possessed of every attribute that can excite the admiration, love, and esteem of His intelligent creatures. Holiness is the chief and brightest attribute of the Godhead. Sin aims at the destruction of all the perfections of God. 2. The law of God is a transcript of His perfections. It is not only holy and just, but likewise good, calculated to promote the happiness of those who are subject to its authority. Sin is the transgression of the law, and therefore must contain in it a malignity and vileness proportioned to the purity and excellence of the law of God. Sin is the greatest of evils because it is opposite to the greatest good. II. IN ITS EFFECTS. Within us and around us we contemplate the baneful consequences of this mortal evil. No sorrow or misery of any kind can be named that does not spring from this root of bitterness. 1. See mischief done to the angels who kept not their first estate. 2. Man, formed after his Maker's image, is likewise become a fallen and sinful creature. The calamities of earth bear marks of man's fatal apostasy from God. The whole creation groaneth. 3. The effects of sin are even

yet more serious in a future and eternal state. III. THE VIEWS WHICH PERSONS IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS ENTERTAIN CONCERNING SIN. These differ according to their different moral characters. The more profligate a man becomes, the less evil he perceives in sin. The purer a man is the clearer and deeper are his convictions of the guilt and danger of transgressing the law of God. (*David Black.*) *The folly of sinners in making a mock at sin*.—I. THE CHARACTER OF WICKED AND UNGODLY MEN. The phrase "making a mock" sometimes signifies an abusing of others by violent and lewd actions; sometimes an exposing of men to shame and dishonour; sometimes an imposing upon the credulity of others, things that seem incredible and impossible; sometimes it is taken for a failing in our promises. Two other acceptations that are more to the present purpose. 1. The word "mock" is taken for scoffing, or bitter taunting at others (Luke xxiii. 11; Heb. xi. 36). 2. Mocking may be taken for slighting, and making no account of; looking upon things or persons as trivial and inconsiderable. II. THE CENSURE PASSED UPON THEM. They are "fools" who make a mock at sin. 1. They are fools who make a mock at other men's sins, so as to turn them into matter of jest and raillery. Consider what an accursed, horrid thing it is to tempt others to sin only that thou mayest afterwards make sport with them, and raise a scene of mirth out of the ruin of their souls. How desperately impious, wicked wretches they are who sin only to make others sport. 2. They are fools who make a mock at their own sins, so as to think the commission of them but a slight, inconsiderable matter. This will appear from three things. Slight provocations and easy temptations are sufficient to make them rush boldly into the commission of sin. It is very hard to work these men into any true sorrow or compunction for their sins. If they are moved at all with these things; yet they think that a slight and formal repentance will suffice to make amends for all. What is it that induceth and persuadeth wicked men to make so light of their sins? Two answers: 1. Because they see so few instances of God's dread wrath and vengeance executed on sinners in this life; and those rare ones, that are extant and visible, they impute rather to chance than to the retribution of Divine justice. 2. And because it is assumed that God cannot be affected with any real injury, for, as He is not benefited by our service, so He is not wronged by our iniquities. The great and inexcusable folly of making light of sin cannot be surpassed. (*E. Hopkins, D.D.*) *The conduct of the mocker*.—I. It involves impiety. To mock at sin is to despise God's holiness, to set at nought His authority, to abuse God's goodness, to disregard and slight God's glory, to make light of God's curse and threatened vengeance; which implies a denial of God's truth, and a scornful defiance of God's power. 2. It involves cruelty. There breathes not on earth a more inhuman, a more iron-hearted monster, than the man who "makes a mock at sin." 3. And such mockery is most infatuated. Sin is the evil that is ruining the poor sinner himself—hurrying him to perdition. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *The folly of mocking at religion*.—I. PROVE THAT THE NAME OF FOOLS IS DUE TO THOSE WHO MOCK AT SIN. There are three ways whereby wicked men seek to justify themselves. By laying the blame of all their evil actions, either upon the fatal necessity of all events, the unavoidable frailty of human nature, or the impossibility of keeping the laws of heaven. These plausible pretences are worthless, and those who plead them are thus declared to be "fools." II. MAKE PARTICULAR IMPEACHMENT OF THEIR FOLLY, BECAUSE THEY MAKE A MOCK AT SIN. This is proved because—1. This mocking argues the highest degree of wickedness; and—2. Betrays the greatest weakness of judgment, and want of consideration. If to sin be folly, to make a mock of it is little short of madness. The folly is seen in view of—1. Whom they provoke, even the Governor of the world. 2. Whom the injury redounds to. 3. There can be no imaginable consideration thought on which might look like a plausible temptation to it. What is it which the persons who despise religion, and laugh at everything serious, propose to themselves as the reasons for what they do? (*Wp. Stillington.*) *Fools*.—I. WHO ARE THOSE WHO MAKE A MOCK AT SIN? 1. The man who openly glories in his own wickedness. 2. The man who winks at, or smiles graciously on, the evil deeds of other men, in business, politics, or social life. 3. Those who mock at the reprovers of sin. 4. He who leads others into sin, or encourages others to abide in it. Every man makes a mock at sin who, either in his religious creed, or by his daily conduct, shows that he regards sin as a trifle. If you would understand why God denounces sin as something terrible and monstrous, you must observe its awful consequences, inquiring not merely what sin is, but what sin has done and will do. Sin is a disease of the soul; a paralysis that weakens a leprosy that pollutes, a plague that tortures, a pestilence that destroys

the whole spirit within us. II. WHY ARE SUCH MOCKERS FOOLS? To make a mock at a thing is, in a way, either to treat it or regard it as of little moment. And if the thing is very mighty or great, either in itself or in its influences, such mockery must be foolish. (*C. Wadsworth, D.D.*) *The folly of mocking at sin*:—I. THEY ARE FOOLS WHO MAKE A MOCK AT OTHER MEN'S SINS. Sins which are open and going beforehand unto judgment, are but too often made the occasion of mirth and scoffing. Wine is a mocker, and the man overtaken with it is the butt of his companion's ridicule. Violation of chastity is the chosen theme of many thoughtless persons' merriment. The monstrous liar finds many ready to draw him out, that they may laugh at his folly in supposing they will believe his incredible fictions. God looks on all, and says the mockers are fools, for that which they laugh at is no jesting matter, either in its nature or in its consequences; and let those who have been accustomed even to smile at the sins of others, ponder—1. What every sin is; 2. What every sin deserves. II. THEY ARE FOOLS WHO MAKE A MOCK AT SIN IN THEMSELVES, so as to think lightly of it, and treat its commission as an inconsiderable matter. 1. He is a fool who mocks at his sin, taking up a certain guilt on the hope of an uncertain repentance. 2. Supposing you were infallibly certain that repentance would be given, you would still be a fool in mocking at your sin, and going on in it in hope of repentance. For what is repentance? Not an easy, soft balm to the conscience, but the sword of the Spirit cutting into the heart, and piercing even to the dividing asunder of joints and marrow. 3. They are fools who make light of their sins, hoping they will be pardoned, for in so doing they mock at Christ's sufferings. (*G. Innes, M.A.*)

Ver. 10. **The heart knoweth his own bitterness; and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.**—*Man unknown to man*:—You cannot completely know your fellow-man. Every man is, in a measure, self-contained. Alone are we born, one by one; alone do we die, one by one. It is not surprising that we must be, in a measure, unknown to others, since we do not even fully know ourselves. There are points of individuality in each man which render him distinct from every other. Men in their highest and deepest conditions are remarkably secretive. The extreme heights and depths lie in darkness. Learn, then, that we may not judge our brethren as though we understood them, and were competent to give a verdict upon them. If we desire to show sympathy to our brethren, let us not dream that this is an easy task. Study the art of sympathy. We all need sympathy, and there is but One who can fully give it to us. I. **THE HEART KNOWS A BITTERNESS PECULIAR TO ITSELF.** This is true in a natural, common, and moral sense. Concerning any man this is true. The shoe pinches on every foot, and that foot alone knows where the pinch is felt. Do not intrude into the hidden sorrows of any. Most solemnly this is true concerning the godless man and concerning the awakened man. When the Holy Spirit begins to convince the man of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, then "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." And concerning the backslider. And concerning the tried believer. But the singularity of his suffering is the dream of the sufferer. Others have seen affliction too. Know thy sorrow well. And remember that the cure for bitterness of heart is to take it to your Lord at once. II. **THE HEART KNOWS A SWEETNESS WHICH IS ALL ITS OWN.** 1. The joy of pardoned sin. 2. The bliss of vanquished evil. 3. The joy of perfect reconciliation with God. 4. The joy of accepted service. 5. The joy of answered prayer. 6. The joy of peace in the time of trouble. 7. The joy of communion with God. (*C.H. Spurgeon.*) *On the joy and the bitterness of the heart*:—The sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart are two. 1. A man's own mind of temper—a man's personal character. Every man is more connected with himself than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts; and what he meets with there must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness or his disquiet. A good conscience, and good temper, prepare, even in the midst of poverty, a continual feast. How sadly the scene is reversed if a man's temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation. The wounds which the spirit suffers are owing chiefly to three causes: to folly, to passion, or to guilt. The external misfortunes of life, disappointments, poverty, and sickness are nothing in comparison of those inward distresses of mind occasioned by folly, by passion, and by guilt. 2. The connection in which a man stands with some of his fellow-creatures—a man's social feelings. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an external nature. Having connected us in society by many ties, it is the decree of the Creator that these ties should prove, both during

their subsistence and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain immediately, and often deeply affecting the human heart. The most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connections we have from others. The practical improvement to which this doctrine leads: 1. Let it serve to moderate our passion for riches and high situations in the world. It is well known that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Then contemplate these things with an impartial eye. 2. Let these observations correct our mistakes, and check our complaints, concerning a supposed promiscuous distribution of happiness in this world. The charge of injustice brought against Providence rests entirely on this ground, that the happiness and misery of men may be estimated by the degree of their external prosperity. This is the delusion under which the multitude have always laboured, but which a just consideration of the invisible springs of happiness that affect the heart is sufficient to correct. Judge not of the real condition of men from what floats merely on the surface of their state. 3. Let us turn our attention to those internal sources of happiness or misery on which so much depends. What is amiss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care under the assistance of Divine grace. 4. Let us frequently look up to Him who made the human heart, and implore His assistance in the regulation and government of it. The employments of devotion themselves form one of the most powerful means of composing and tranquillising the heart. Devotion opens a sanctuary to which they whose hearts have been most deeply wounded can always fly. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The secret sorrows and joys of the heart known to God:*—Each man's heart is to himself a solitude, into which he can retire and be alone, indulging his own thoughts without an associate and without a witness. There is a world within which must lie undiscovered by the acutest observer. And we could not make the discovery to others even if we would. It would not be possible to communicate to another all that is within us. It is one of the delights and benefits of friendship that it helps men, in a measure, to open their minds to one another. But this can only be done in part. Every one has his reserve. This is especially true respecting the sorrows and joys of religion. No Christian can find a spirit so perfectly kindred to his own as to be able to comprehend all the sources of his grief or of his gladness. In many a sorrow, and in many a joy, he must be solitary. He could not make a full revelation of himself if he would; he would not if he could. God hath so ordered it that no man can fully reveal to another the secrets of his soul. This truth is of the utmost importance when set beside the other truth, that God "knoweth us altogether." Two practical lessons: 1. If God is thus near to us, nearer than the closest and most intimate friend can be, we ought to feel His nearness, and bear about with us the constant sense of it. 2. If our hearts are in a great measure shut out from our fellow-man, and open only to God, it is in His sympathy that we should seek our happiness. (*G. Bellett.*) *Cases of bitterness of heart:*—I. OF UNREVEALED AND NEGLECTED SORROWS, A LARGE PROPORTION ARISES FROM A STRONG, NATURAL PROPENSITY TO DEJECTION AND MELANCHOLY. As wounds which are occasioned by external violence are more conspicuous, but less dangerous, than the hidden disease which preys upon the vital parts. Some whose circumstances are prosperous are always in the glooms, their feeble mind spreads its malignant tincture over every surrounding prospect. Spectators form their opinions from exterior circumstances, hence they cannot give their sympathy where they cannot observe sufficient cause of misery. Were they ever so much disposed to give it this miserable man would have none of their comfort. II. THERE IS A CLASS OF MEN WHO MIGHT SUCCEED BETTER IN PROCURING THE SYMPATHY OF THE WORLD COULD THEY BUT TELL THE CAUSE OF THEIR SORROW. Disappointments in a long train have fallen upon the man's head, and the manliness of his spirit is subdued, and he surrenders himself a willing subject to peevishness and despair. Ambition defeated may fret and chagrin the aspiring mind. Affection slighted gives a deep and incurable wound to the man of a feeling heart. III. THE MAN WHO SECRETLY GRIEVES FOR THE TREACHERY OF A FRIEND HAS EVEN A MORE SERIOUS CLAIM UPON OUR SYMPATHY. Such a man is sure to say, "My bitterness shall be known only to my own heart." IV. DOMESTIC SOURCES OF DISQUIETUDE. These, from motives of delicacy, are secreted from the notice and sympathy of the world. V. CASES OF PERSONS WHO HAVE CHANGED THEIR STATION IN LIFE, AND CANNOT FIT TO THEIR NEW CONDITIONS. As in imperfectly assorted marriages. What misery is experienced which must be kept in reserve. VI. THE MAN WHO CARRIES GRIEF IN HIS BOSOM ON ACCOUNT OF CONSCIOUS

IMPERFECTION AND INCONSISTENCY OF CHARACTER. He has often resolved upon reformation, made strenuous efforts against temptations, but has failed and relapsed again under the bondage of sin. This has occasioned miserable agitation and perplexity of soul. He mourns in secret that he is not such as his own resolutions prescribe, and the world around him believes him to be. To all earnest persons it is a matter of deep concern to find that a great proportion of secret sorrow falls to the share of those who are most useful, and deserve best from society. (*T. Somerville, D.D.*) *The heart's hidden depths*:—Though men live in towns and cities, and in social gatherings, each man is a world to himself. He is as distinct, even from him who is in closest material or mental contact with him, as one orb of heaven is from another. I. THE HEART HAS HIDDEN DEPTHS OF SORROW. There is bitterness in every heart. 1. There is the bitterness of disappointed love. 2. There is the bitterness of social bereavement—Rachels weeping for their lost children, and Davids for their Absaloms. 3. There is the bitterness of moral remorse. All this is hidden where it is the most deep. The deepest sorrow in the human heart is hidden from others from three causes. 1. The insulating tendency of deep grief. Deep sorrow withdraws from society and seeks some Gethsemane of solitude. 2. The concealing instinct of deep grief. Men parade little sorrows, but conceal great ones. Deep sorrows are mute. 3. The incapacity of one soul to sound the depths of another. There is such a peculiarity in the constitution and circumstances of each soul that one can never fully understand another. II. THE HEART HAS HIDDEN DEPTHS OF JOY. "A stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy." Though joy is less self-concealing than sorrow, yet it has depths unknown to any but its possessor and its God. The joy that rushed into Abraham's heart when Isaac descended with him from the altar on Moriah; the joy of the father when he pressed his prodigal son to his bosom; the joy of the widow of Nain when her only son raised himself from the bier, and returned to gladden her lowly home; the joy of the broken-hearted woman when she heard Christ say, "Thy sins are all forgiven thee"; such joy has depths that no outward eye could penetrate. The joy of the true Christian is indeed a joy "unspeakable and full of glory." This subject furnishes an argument—1. For candour amongst men. 2. For piety towards God. Though men know us not, God does. (*Homilist.*) *Bitterness of heart*:—While the Christian has no promise of exemption from the general sufferings of humanity, he has trials peculiar to the life of faith. I. THE NATURE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S BITTERNESS OF HEART. It is hazardous to represent the Christian life as a scene of constant sunshine and unaltered joy. This has occasioned much uneasiness and disappointment. The heart that is right with God has much anxiety, disquiet, and sorrow. These are dependent on disposition and temperament. II. THE SOURCES OF SUCH INWARD SORROW AND DISTRESS. 1. The secret consciousness of guilt. 2. The general infirmity of our intellectual and moral constitution. For instance, that depression of animal spirits to which some of the most regularly constituted minds are often most subject, and which no intellectual energy is at times able to dissipate or surmount. 3. Fears of shortcoming are sometimes the result of that increased spirituality of mind which marks the progress of the Divine life. Whatever be the attainments of the Christian, he has often hours of heaviness and alarm, and is troubled with distressing apprehensions respecting the safety of his state before God. This feeling must, of course, be greatly modified by the temper and circumstances of the believer, and in different individuals may arise from different causes. (*John Johnston.*) *The bitterness and joy of the heart*:—1. There is a bitterness and a joy of the heart which may be called more peculiarly its own, because it arises from the temper of the mind, which gives its own tone to circumstances and things in themselves indifferent. There is a marked contrast between the minds of different individuals. Every day is full of events which receive the character of good or evil from the mind of the individual related to them. Then, since so much depends on the cultivation of the mind and heart, let this be your chief concern. 2. The heart alone is conscious of its own feelings. Happiness and misery have no existence but in the conscious breast, and they are in a great measure confined to it. There are some sensations which the heart never attempts to express. There are some which it is our wish and endeavour to express. But how faint is the impression which we can convey to other minds of what is passing in our own. There is but one Being beside ourselves who knows our heart in the joys and sorrows of life. There is but one Being who can enter into our feelings amid the bitterness and joy of death. There is but one Being who can be all in all to our souls, in the changes and chances of this mortal life, and amid the unchang-

ing glories of eternity: "Acquaint thyself with Him; and be at peace." (*George Cole*.) *A private apartment of the mind*:—Each mind possesses in its interior mansions a solemn retired apartment peculiarly its own, into which none but himself and the Deity can enter. (*John Foster*.) *The heart's refusal of the world's interference in its bitterness and joy*:—"If you would seek for God," said a pious man of old, "descend into your own heart."

I. THE IMPERFECT ESTIMATE WHICH WE FORM OF THE REAL STATE OF THE WORLD. One half the world knows not how the other half lives, and certainly one half has no idea of what the other half feels. All have their calamities and sorrows, so that no man has any real occasion for envying his brother. Our afflictions may be divided into those which we suffer from the cruelty of others, those which arise from our own guilt, and those with which Providence, in the general course of His dealings, visits all of us in our turn.

II. THE SIN OF THOSE WHO TRIFLE WITH THE FEELINGS OF AN AFFLICTED HEART. Illustrate from the child who has brought distress on loving parents; the seducer of innocence; the slanderer and tale-bearer. III. THOSE SORROWS WHICH ARISE FROM A SENSE OF OUR STATE TOWARDS GOD. We live, it is true, in a world of much infidelity and sin, but there are many who have accepted the everlasting gospel as the power of God unto salvation. It must have opened on them a very awful view of the things of this life; and when conscience, awakening them to think upon their duty, points to that holy book from which we shall be judged, they can scarcely fail of looking on their life with terror and dismay. IV. THE SORROW ARISING FROM THE ORDINARY VISITATIONS OF PROVIDENCE. But our religion carries consolation with its sorrows. This comes from the belief in the Omniscience of God; in the grace of God; in the promise of remission of sins; in the assurance of a general resurrection. (*G. Mathew, M.A.*) *On the secret bitterness of the heart*:—Nothing is to be estimated by its effects upon common eyes and common ears.

1. Among the mental dispositions which prevail with the sufferer to smother his secret pangs and bitternesses from public inspection, the first is pride, whether of a pardonable or an improper description. Timidity is not less solicitous than pride to wrap up its griefs from general observation. Prudence and a sense of duty exert a similar influence. 2. When the circumstances of a sufferer are outward and visible, his perception of his calamity may be far more acute than the common observer surmises. And the heart of a man may be wrung with an unusual bitterness in consequence of its unusually delicate sense of religious and moral obligation. Practical improvements: 1. The survey delivers a lecture on resignation and contentment* and disproves the notion that there is actually any large inequality in the Divine distribution of good and evil among mankind. 2. The subject suggests an instructive lesson of mutual sympathy and kindness in all the varieties of outward condition. There never has breathed yet one individual in the full enjoyment of pure, unalloyed happiness. 3. Take care that the common and unavoidable uneasiness shall not be aggravated by that self-dissatisfaction which arises from wilful disobedience. 4. Remember that we are passing on to a fairer and more faultless condition of being, where the souls of the pious and penitent shall have their capacity for enjoyment filled up to the brim. (*J. Grant, M.A.*) *The believer's sorrows and joys*:—I. THE BELIEVER'S SORROWS. There are sorrows common to believers and to unbelievers. There are some peculiar to the renewed man. Those are the most alive to sin who are most free from sin. A strong sense of sin is one of the characteristics of the real man of God. Believers are also at times unable to receive the promises. When comfort is offered they cannot avail themselves of it. Sometimes there is great spiritual depression under a sense of the withdrawal of God's favour. But there is nothing more dangerous than to leave the soul in this state of bitterness of heart. II. THE BELIEVER'S JOYS. What is it in which he finds joy? 1. From the joyful sound of the everlasting gospel. 2. The joy of pardoning grace applied to the soul. 3. The fulness of Divine grace. 4. Communion with God. (*H. M. Villiers, M.A.*) *The inward unapproachable life*:—

We know each other's appearance, but there for the most part our mutual knowledge ceases. It is possible to live on terms of even close intimacy with a person for many years, and yet to find, by some chance uplifting of a curtain in his life, that he cherished feelings which you never even suspected, suffered pains of which you had seen no trace, or enjoyed pleasures which never came to any outward expression. The bitterness which surges in our brother's heart would probably be unintelligible to us if he revealed it, but he will not reveal it, he cannot. And yet we all hunger for sympathy. No human being needs to be misunderstood, or to suffer under the sense of misunderstanding. Let him turn at once to God. If he

cannot tell his bitterness to his fellows, he can tell it to God. No human being need imagine that he is unappreciated; his fellow-men may not want him, but God does. No human being need be without a sharer of his joy. And that is a great consideration, for joy unshared quickly dies, and is from the beginning haunted by a vague sense of a shadow that is falling upon it. In the heart of the Eternal dwells eternal joy. All loveliness, all sweetness, all goodness, all truth, are the objects of His happy contemplation; therefore every really joyful heart has an immediate sympathiser in God, and prayer is quite as much the means by which we share our gladness as the vehicle by which we convey our sorrows to the Divine heart. (R. F. Horton, D.D.)

Ver. 12. *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*—*Forelookings*:—It seems strange that all the dangers of this mortal state should be concentrated upon man. The dangers in all the realms below man are very few, and very simple, and very brief in their scope. Man, who is called the noblest of God's creatures, is perpetually stumbling; is perpetually warped, biassed, perverted, tangled; is perpetually threatened with sudden destructions of every kind. He is the sublimest spectacle in his integrity and greatness, and the most wretched in his wreck and ruin. Man is more complex than the animals. He lives in a higher sphere. He is equipped accordingly. He varies most because he has the most power of variation, and because the combinations possible to one so richly endowed are almost infinite. All men alike are brought into life in a state of helplessness and ignorance. It is not true that all men are born equal or alike. There are unquestionable hereditary tendencies. All are born alike in this: that they have to begin and find out the ways of life. It is not possible for any parent to transmit the whole of his experience to his children. So, in the beginning of life, God's voice sounds to every one, as in the text, "Beware, all ways are not alike safe." But how should ways seem right and yet be wrong? There are many things whose nature does not disclose itself at once. Illustrate cubs of tigers. A large part of evil lies in excess in things good. If you trace one and another of the great mature powers of men, you will find that, if they act thus far, and under certain dominant influences, they are beneficial; but that otherwise they are vicious. So men are often deceived in the ways of life, as they look upon them at first, because the point where good breaks off, and evil begins to be developed, is not easily discerned. There are ways that seem right to men, but are very dangerous. In general, it is true that pleasure is the fruit of obedience. Punishment (speaking generally) is an indication of transgression, and pleasure is a sign of obedience. Nevertheless, it is also true that pain sometimes indicates the highest degree of virtue. To suffer is to be a man. But there is much evil which is known for evil as soon as it is seen, but which, before manifesting itself openly, runs through what may be called an incubation. Illustrate infectious disease. The most inconsequential elements of life are those that report themselves quickest, with superficial results; the most fundamental and radical elements do not report themselves until they have had a long period of development. It is a fact that men are busy with their fellow-men to beguile them. In this life we act on each other, far more than we are acted on by great natural agents. It is a great danger to any young man to be conceited in his own wisdom and in his own strength. Those who think they have a strength and a wisdom which others have not, and act accordingly, perish because they are fools. No man is safe who does not give heed to the Word of God and to the presence of the Lord. You are perfectly safe so long as you live with a consciousness that God looks upon you. (H. Ward Beecher.) *The way which seemeth right*:—In consequence of the paralysis of the natural conscience, the phenomenon indicated in the text is of constant occurrence. Reference is not to the course of the open sinner, but to that of the mistaken and self-deceiving man. There are persons whose course lies just short of that degree of divergence from right, where the conscience begins to protect, and yet is sure, as every divergence must, if followed, to lead very far from it at last. Observe that the text does not say that these apparently right ways are themselves the ways of death, but that they end in the ways of death. The ways of which we are to speak are mainly of two kinds; errors in practice and errors in doctrine. 1. A life not led under the direct influence of religion. The man who, however many virtues he may possess, however upright he may be in the duties of life, however carefully he may attend to the duties of religion, does not receive it into his heart, nor act on its con-

siderations as a motive. This is a way of life which usually seems right to a man. It describes the ordinary, unexceptionable citizen of a peaceful and religious age. But this way must end in the ways of death. One day they must come into the presence of God, and stand before Him. Wherewith shall they come? They have left God out of their calculation. That neglect is a way of death. 2. Those who, believing from the heart, and living in the main as in God's sight, are yet notoriously and confessedly wanting in some important requisite of the gospel. This case is found even in the very strongholds of the profession of religion. It may be illustrated by all the violent partisanship which is so characteristic of our day. The case is found again in the class of persons who, while professing zeal for religion in general, nourish unscrupulously some one known sin, or prohibited indulgence. But He whom we serve will not have a reserved life, but a whole one. 3. There is a class of persons who deal with erroneous doctrine as the other class with deficient practice. These plead that each should conscientiously arrive at his own conclusion, and respect that conclusion as sacred. But this involves much more than is suspected at first sight. The issue of what has been said is this, and it is a lesson by no means unneeded in the present day, that whether we consider practice or belief, each man's deeming is not each man's law; every man's deeming may be wrong, and we can only find that which is right by each one of us believing and serving God, as He has revealed himself to us in Christ. There is but one way that is true; but one, and that is the way everlasting. (*Dean Alford.*) *Wrong ways followed in spite of warning:*—And yet the man who takes what seems to him a right way (but is wrong) will be punished if he follows it, for his perverted conscience may arise from his desertion of God, and his refusal of the light He offered. (*J. W. Nutt, M.A.*) *Deceitful ways:*—Unconcern, which is charming in the child, is ridiculous and guilty in the man whose decisions are likely to involve fearful consequences for himself and for others; want of foresight is a crime for the man who holds in his hands the fortunes of others or the destinies of a state. There are ways that lead to death. Each of us has come into contact with beings whose excesses have led to a premature end; others still occupy a place in the world, but their ruined health, their weakened faculties, show that they are dead while they live. But there are beings who are attacked neither in their life nor in their strength, nor in their apparent dignity, and who are none the better for all this. The artful, the selfish, who think only of self, may possess all kinds of earthly blessings; their life may be rich, brilliant, full of enjoyment, admired of men. Does this mean that they have not entered upon a wrong path? Worldly morality is a loose net which retains certain sinners, but allows the most guilty to escape. Many a way that leads to perdition may seem to us right. Men argue that the way a man follows must seem to him right, and so they persuade themselves that they will be accepted of God. In this there is a mingling of truth and error. But sincerity in ignorance or error has never saved any one from the often terrible consequences which such ignorance or error may entail. Societies are based upon this axiom, "No one is supposed to be ignorant of the law." (*E. Bersier.*) *Unsafe ways:*—The wise man is not here speaking of gross wickedness. It is of the deceitful path. Is there only one such way? I. THE WAY OF WILFUL IGNORANCE. This is very commonly thought a safe way, but its end is death. How constantly ignorance is pleaded as an excuse for neglecting religion. Ignorance that is voluntary is sinful. II. THE WAY OF FORMALITY. An outward form and imitation of godliness, without any inward spiritual feeling. But professions can never deceive God, and the way of formal religion offends Him. III. THE WAY OF DOING ONE'S BEST. This is often thought to be the right way; yet it is equally ruinous. What do men mean by "doing their best"? Alas! it commonly means doing something less than God requires. In numberless instances, doing the best means "doing nothing at all." IV. THE WAY OF UNCOVENANTED MERCY. Men own that they are sinners, and deserving of punishment, but they speak peace to themselves, saying, "God is merciful." It is true that God is merciful, but there is a particular way in which alone that mercy is offered to sinners. God has never said that He will spare the unconverted, the impenitent, the unbelieving, the ungodly. V. THE WAY OF GOOD INTENTIONS. A man resolves to seek God; and that, too, in God's own way, by true repentance, faith in Christ, and by a life of holy obedience. But he stops with the resolves. That way is a way of death. (*J. Jowett, M.A.*) *The way and the end:*—We are all travellers. Our journey occupies our lifetime. Its end depends upon the way we take. The endings are but two. Yet many go heedlessly on. They love the way, and they are pleased to

think well of it. 1. It is the way in which they were born. 2. They see many walking in this way. 3. It is a way which is most pleasing to them. 4. It is an easy way to walk in. 5. It is a way which is profitable to self. How shall we know this way of death? It is the way of sin. It is the course of this world. It is the way of indifference to the things of eternity. (*The Christian Treasury.*) *A temper of caution*:—The text holds good in commerce, in theological thought, in moral conduct, in social relationships; indeed, it holds good along the whole circle of human relation and experience. What is the lesson which such a state of affairs conveys to the wise and understanding heart? It is that life should be spent in a temper of caution; when we seem most secure we may be most exposed to danger; not only is our enemy a roaring lion, whose voice can be heard from afar, he is also a cunning and silent serpent, drawing himself towards us without making any demonstration, and not revealing himself until he is within striking distance. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The seeming right often ruinous*:—Many of the ways which men pursue cannot even “seem right.” The way of the habitual blasphemer, Sabbath-breaker, debauchee, &c., can scarcely appear right to any man. What are the ways that often seem right to men, but are ruinous? I. THE CONVENTIONALLY MORAL WAY SEEMS RIGHT, BUT IS NEVERTHELESS RUINOUS. Civilised society has its recognised rules of life. These rules recognise only the external life of man. They take no cognisance of thought, feeling, desire, and the unexpressed things of the soul. Industry, sobriety, veracity, honesty, these are the extent of its demands, and if these are conformed to, society approves and applauds. Without disparaging in the least this social morality, we are bound to say that what is conventionally moral may be essentially wrong. It may spring from wrong motives, and be governed by wrong reasons. The Scribes and Pharisees of old were conventionally right. Albeit they were rotten to the core. The end of such a way is death. Death to all the elements of well-being. II. THE FORMALISTICALLY RELIGIOUS WAY SEEMS RIGHT, BUT IS NEVERTHELESS RUINOUS. Religion has its forms, it has its places, and its times of worship, its order of service, its benevolent institutions. A correct and constant attendance to such forms are considered by thousands as religion itself. It is mechanism, nothing more. The motions of machinery, not the actions of the soul. There is no life in it, and it cannot lead to life, but to death. III. THE WAY OF THE SELFISHLY EVANGELICAL SEEMS RIGHT, BUT IS NEVERTHELESS RUINOUS. There is no true religion apart from a living faith in Christ. But the thing that is come to be called evangelical is to a fearful extent intensely selfish. Its appeals are all to the hopes and fears of men. Its preaching makes men feel, but their feelings are all concerned for their own interest; makes men pray, but their prayer is a selfish entreaty for the deliverance from misery, and the attainment of happiness. “He that seeketh his life shall lose it.” Conclusion: Right and wrong are independent of men’s opinions, what seems right to men is often wrong, and the reverse. Men are held responsible for their beliefs. A wrong belief, however sincere, will lead to ruin. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Moral colour-blindness, or the seeing things truly*:—Not a few persons have received a genuine surprise on being told, after an examination, that they were affected with colour-blindness. A much larger number might experience a far greater shock on learning that they are suffering from moral colour-blindness. The eye that fails to distinguish colours may be exceptionally good in judging of form, and unusually keen in detecting objects at a distance. The victim of colour-blindness may even name colours so correctly that for a long time his defect escapes notice. So the person that is morally colour-blind is frequently one distinguished for remarkable shrewdness and foresight; he is quite an oracle as to what is prudent in business and in good taste in social life. He names the virtues and vices as other people do, and his verdicts on conduct seem so generally to tally with the truth that his weakness is not suspected by others, and is entirely hidden from himself. Yet the moral colour-blindness goes to much greater length than does the ordinary trouble. Its radical evil is in a failure to distinguish black and white, a defect exceedingly rare in the physical eye. When the fault is betrayed, even in the slightest degree, in judgments on nice points, it is a sign of something deep-seated and serious, which will lead one to pronounce a lie white, and to call evil good and good evil. The revelation of its true nature may come, as the revelation of the other colour-blindness has sometimes come, in some terrible wreck that means ruin to many others as well as to the one at fault. Too much care in this matter cannot be exercised in regard to any one, whether in his own behalf or in behalf of those whose safety depends in large measure on his seeing things truly. There is a

terrible danger in following a colour-blind leader. There is one advantage and encouragement for the morally colour-blind. The defect is not, in their case, organic; and, while it may develop with startling rapidity if neglected, it is possible to overcome it. Its detection, as well as its cure, depends on the most careful and constant testing by the truest standards and on hourly aid from the great Physician. (*Christian Age*.) *The way seems right, but is wrong*:—A sailor remarks, "Sailing from Cuba, we thought we had gained sixty miles one day in our course, but at the next observation we found we had lost more than thirty. It was an under-current. The ship had been going forward by the wind, but going back by a current." So a man's course may often seem to be right, but the stream beneath is driving him the very contrary way to what he thinks. *Beliefs important; or sincerity no safeguard*:—Two men were talking together of their beliefs, when one of them petulantly remarked to his Christian brother: "I don't care what your creed is. I am an agnostic. It makes no difference what a man believes if he is sincere." Oh, yes, it does. Let us see. A family was poisoned recently by eating toadstools which they sincerely believed to be mushrooms. Three of them died. Did it make no difference? A man endorsed a note for a friend whom he sincerely believed to be an honest man. He was a scoundrel, and left him to pay the debt. Did it make no difference? A traveller took the wrong train, and went to Scotland instead of to Brighton. Did it make no difference? If a man is sincere he will take pains to know the truth. For where facts are concerned all the thinking in the world will not change them. A toadstool remains a toadstool, whatever we may think about it. (*Sunday Companion*.)

Ver. 13. **Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.**—*On a life of dissipation and pleasure*:—We have much reason to beware lest a rash and unwary pursuit of pleasure defeat its end, lest the attempt to carry pleasure too far tend, in the issue, to sink us into misery. It would be unjust to infer, from the serious admonition of Scripture, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumscribes our enjoyment, indeed, within the bounds of temperance; but as far as the sacred limit permits, it gives free scope to the gratifications of life. It even heightens their relish to a virtuous man. The text is applicable only to that set of men to whom temperance is no restraint. A mediocrity of enjoyment only is allowed man for his portion on earth. Whatever a man's rank or station may be, there are certain duties required of him, there are serious cares which must employ his mind. 1. The obvious consequences of a life of pleasure and dissipation to health, fortune, and character. To each of these it is an enemy, precisely in the same degree to which it is carried. A temporary satisfaction is admitted. But no sensual pleasure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be lasting. 2. The ruin which a life of pleasure and dissipation brings upon the moral state and character of men, as well as on their external condition. As the love of pleasure gains ground, with what insidious steps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles! Without the assistance of reflection and of serious thought, virtue cannot long subsist in the human mind. But to reflection and serious thought the men of dissipation are strangers. Men become assimilated to the manners of their loose associates; and, without perceiving it themselves, their whole character by degrees is changed. From a character originally stamped only with giddiness and levity shoots forth a character compounded of dishonesty, injustice, oppression, and cruelty. 3. The disquieting sensations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleasure, even in the midst of their enjoyments. Often a show of mirth is put on to cover some secret disquiet. At the bottom of the hearts of most men, even amidst an irregular life, there lies a secret feeling of propriety, a sense of right and wrong in conduct. Though conscience be not strong enough to guide, it still has strength to dart a sting. Can that be reckoned sincere joy which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with so many sensations of the most disagreeable nature? 4. How unsuitable a life of dissipation and pleasure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the interests of society. Amid the sorrows that surround us, and in view of the brevity of life, should we be pursuing giddy amusement and perpetual pleasure? Such persons scatter poison in society around them. They are corrupting the public manners by the life they live. They create discontent and indignation in the poorer classes of men, who see them indulging in wastefulness and thoughtless profusion, when they and their families are not able to earn their bread. To serve God, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of

our station, ought to be the first concern of every man who wishes to be wise and happy. Amusement and pleasure are the relaxation, not the business, of life. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *Sorrow amid laughter*:—A description of Mr. Opie Read, the American humorist, reveals heart-sorrow where the reader has seen nothing but mirth. "Sometimes," says the writer, "his work is marked by the deepest pathos. He had lost two of his children, to whom he was devotedly attached, and these melancholy events made very marked impressions on the man and his work. 'When one of my babies died,' said he, in talking of the matter to me, 'I was working for a magazine, and I was required to do just so much work every day. I was compelled to do it—it was my only means of support. During that awful time I would frequently rock the cradle of my dying babe for hours at the time. With one hand I rocked that cradle of death, and with the other I was writing stuff to make people laugh. I sobbed and wept, and watched that angel and wrote that stuff, and I felt every minute as if my heart would burst. And yet some people think this funny business is all sunshine. Sometimes even now I see articles floating around that I wrote while under the shadow of death, and occasionally some editor will preface these very things with some such remark as, 'The genial and sunny-souled Opie Read says so and so,'—yes, about these same things that I penned when my babe was dying and my heart was bursting.'" (*J. F. B. Tinsling.*)

Ver. 14. The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.—*The backslider in heart*:—I. THE GENERAL NATURE, SYMPTOMS, AND PROGRESS OF BACKSLIDING. The idea of backsliding is that of gradually receding from an object full in view. It is not the turning back as in the case of those who forsook the Saviour, it is rather like those who, moving against the stream, rest upon their oars. The backslider is one who has had some views and some experience, whether real or supposed, of true religion: there may even have been some enjoyment in the things of religion; but after some progress there is a gradual declension, a loss of taste and enjoyment, a decline in ardour and zeal. Particular symptoms of backsliding may be seen—1. In the manner in which the secret duties of religion are attended to. 2. In attendance at public worship. 3. In the conduct, temper, and conversation. The progress of backsliding is from bad to worse. There is a gradual relinquishment of principle, an increasing laxity of practice, and an abuse of Christian privileges into an excuse for sin. II. THE AWFUL CONSEQUENCES OF BACKSLIDING. "Shall be filled with his own ways." View the backslider. He has lost his delight, his enjoyment in religion. It is now an irksome task. He has gone down on the world's ground; does he find comfort there? No, he is still dissatisfied, still perplexed. He becomes impatient, irritable; a burden to himself, a burden to others. How tremendously will the text be found true when the finally impenitent is in that place where hope never comes! (*T. Webster, B.D.*) *Backslider in heart*:—Only case in English Bible where the word "backslider" occurs. I. DESCRIBE WHAT BACKSLIDING IN HEART IS. To some the experience which we call "conversion" is more consciously definite than to others. Recall the experience. If the love then felt has not continued, there is backsliding in heart. The experience is compatible with great zeal and activity, with the maintenance of sound discipline, and with decided orthodoxy. The backslider in heart is thus described in the Word of God: he has lost his first love; he is lukewarm in spirit; mixed up with the world; double-minded and faint-hearted. II. SOME OF THE THINGS THAT CONDUCE TO BACKSLIDING OF HEART. 1. Neglect of the Word of God. Most, if not all, such backsliding may be traced to this neglect. 2. Neglect of private prayer. 3. Suffering sin to remain unconfessed. 4. Want of Christian activity. 5. Not making public profession of our love to Christ. III. HOW TO DEAL WITH THE BACKSLIDER IN HEART. "He is filled with his own ways." It is not easy to awaken his interest. It is always difficult to reach his conscience. Argument does not succeed. The only thing to do is to bring them back to their first experience. They must come to Jesus afresh. (*W. P. Lockhart.*) *Progressive backsliding*:—Backsliding in heart necessarily supposes an antecedent rectitude of principle. A man may be a backslider in heart even when he cannot be charged with an open notorious sin. A man may, through the violence of temptation, be led into evil without commencing backsliding in heart. The case of the text is illustrated in Ephraim. In him we may trace the believer in the warmth of espousal love; in all the stages of heart-backsliding, till even surfeited with his own ways; as well as in the humbled state of restoration to his God and Saviour. The first stage of backsliding is a divided heart. Figures

are changed, and the divided heart dwindles into an empty vine. A person may have made great advances in heart-backsliding, yet keep up a profession of religion. Let a professor once dwindle into an empty vine, it is much if he makes no further advances in heart-backsliding. The next stage is self-conceit. Then, with Ephraim, the backslider makes altars to sin. Then he becomes like a wild ass's colt in the wilderness, snuffing up the wind and following the east wind. And a final aggravation is dealing deceitfully with God. Heart-backslidings may be long hid from the view of man, and may be of such a nature that they cannot become matters of Church examination. God is represented as commiserating Ephraim's wretched case. God will give no countenance to his iniquity, nor in any way connive at his sin. God will at last withdraw from him. What can now be expected but Ephraim's final ruin and everlasting overthrow? (*John Macgowan.*)

On backsliding.—I. Is it, then, inquired, IN WHAT DOES THIS BACKSLIDING CONSIST? 1. Let it be remarked, that it may be dated from becoming stationary in religious attainments. If the believer be making no progress in his course, nor attaining to greater proficiency in Christian experience, there exists some radical and internal defect. Already in heart he is deviating from God. Is he not growing in knowledge? Is his relish for Divine objects not becoming stronger? Does he experience no increasing keenness of appetite for spiritual provision? He must then be denominated a backslider, as the deficiency of requisite augmentation in these respects manifests that the present state of his heart is not altogether right with God. 2. Again, it consists in the real decline of those holy dispositions implanted in the soul by the Holy Spirit. The highest state of backsliding into which the genuine believer may fall is the indulgence in any flagrant or atrocious sin. Witness the egregious faults of Noah and Lot, of David and Peter. II. Let us now attend to THE CAUSES AND SYMPTOMS OF THIS SPIRITUAL DISEASE. 1. Let it be recollected in general, that the primary cause of this grievous disorder is the corruption, depravity, and deceitfulness of the human heart. From this contaminated source all deviation from God originates. 2. One particular cause and symptom of backsliding is the intermission of religious duties, the appointed means of increase. It is well known that exercise and employment are necessary to preserve and promote health. Similar is the case with the Christian. Religious exercises and engagements are indispensably requisite for the advancement of gracious habits. The neglect of these will invariably induce declension. Let it suffice to mention two secret duties, inattention to which is particularly productive of declension. These are prayer and self-examination. The former is absolutely requisite for supporting the vital principle of grace, in a lively and prosperous condition. According to the comparisons of some worthy old divines, it is to the soul what the lungs are to the body. The other closet-duty specified as so needful for the prosperity of the soul is self-examination. "They," says a certain writer, "who in a crazy vessel navigate a sea wherein are shoals and currents innumerable, if they would keep their course or reach their port in safety, must carefully repair the smallest injuries, often throw out their line, and take their observations. In the voyage of life, also, the Christian who would not make shipwreck of his faith, while he is habitually watchful and provident, must make it his express business to look into his state, and ascertain his progress." Did we observe an extensive trader entirely neglect his books, and extremely averse to have them examined, a considerable suspicion and strong presumption would be instantly excited, that according to the vulgar phrase, he is going back in the world. (*The Christian Magazine.*)

Backsliders in heart.—The bell-buoy must ring out over the rock all the time because the rock is there all the time. The reason the Bible warns so much about backsliding is because we are always in danger of backsliding. A disease may be eating our life away; our ship in the fog may be drifting upon a rocky coast. We are only in the greater danger if not aware of it. Backsliding begins unexpectedly: like a dangerous disease, it steals into our system so secretly that the utmost vigilance is necessary lest we be taken unawares. I. Let us know, first, THAT BACKSLIDING BEGINS IN THE HEART. The leaves of a fruit-tree begin to fade, curl up, and wither; no fullness of life, no fruit. You suspect a worm—something gnawing at the seat of life—the heart. Men fall as trees do—after gradual decay at the heart (chap. iv. 23; Hosea x. 2). II. Well to remember, also, THAT A BACKSLIDER IN HEART IS NOT ALWAYS A BACKSLIDER IN LIFE. Indeed, he is often a zealous worker in external things; shows honest pride in all Church success. Also keeps up the forms of personal and public Christian duty faithfully, &c. But the form without the power (2 Tim. iii. 5). Rich—poor (Rev. iii. 17).

III. Note, also, SOME OF THE SIGNS OR INDICATIONS OF HAVING BACKSLIDDEN. 1. Loss of relish for private devotions. He may keep them up, but does not enjoy them as formerly (John xv. 9). 2. Loss of interest in God's Word. He may continue to read, but not to love as before (Psa. cxix. 11, 97). 3. Thinking lightly of sin (Sol. Song ii. 5; Gen. xix. 20). 4. Loss of zeal in spiritual work. He does no soul-winning work (2 Tim. iv. 2). IV. Again, consider WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CAUSES OF BACKSLIDING. 1. Getting off guard. Unwatched avenues of approach (Mark xiv. 38). 2. Love of the world. When the world is in, Christ is out (1 John ii. 15). 3. The habitual neglect of a single known duty (Jonah i. 1-3). 4. The habitual indulgence of a single known sin. Compromising; sparing the little one, &c. (2 Sam. xii. 7). V. Lastly, bear in mind SOME OF THE RESULTS OF BACKSLIDING IN HEART. "Shall be filled with his own ways." Not God's ways for His followers. 1. With ways of doubt. Backsliding in heart, how often doubt begins! (Psa. lxxiii. 11). 2. Ways of fault-finding. Everything looks weary because the heart is wrong (Exod. xvi. 2, 3). 3. Ways of alienation. Forsaking the Saviour and His service (Mal. iii. 13-15). 4. Ways of despair. Saddest human condition (1 Sam. xxviii. 6, 15). Are you conscious of having backslidden even the least? (*Evangelist.*) *Is goodness advancing or receding?*—The heart is obedient to some law of heaven; the waters fail to flow by the attraction of sun and moon. In some parts of the globe the sea is gradually gaining on the land; in others it is gradually receding and leaving the land dry and bare. Are the full and cleansing waters of eternal life gaining on our coasts or no? (*Christian Age.*) *Spiritual decline*:—I suppose it would be difficult to describe the causes and workings of consumption and decline. The same kind of disease is common among Christians. It is not that many Christians fall into outward sin, and so on, but throughout our Churches we have scores who are in a spiritual consumption—their powers are all feeble and decaying. They have an unusually bright eye—can see other people's faults exceedingly well—and sometimes they have a flush on their cheeks, which looks very like burning zeal and eminent spiritual life, but it is occasional and superficial. Vital energy is at a low ebb: they do not work for God like genuinely healthy workmen; they do not run in the race of His commandments like athletic racers, determined to win the prize; the heart does not beat with a throb moving the entire man, as a huge engine sends the throbbings of its force throughout the whole of the machinery; they go slumbering on, in the right road it is true, but loitering in it. They do serve God, but it is by the day, as we say, and not by the piece; they do not labour to bring forth much fruit—they are content with here and there a little shrivelled cluster upon the topmost bough. That is the state of mind I want to describe, and it is produced in ninety-nine out of every hundred of believers by a long course of prosperity and absence of spiritual trouble. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) **A good man shall be satisfied from himself.**—*The world's wonder, a contented mind*:—No search is more vain than the search for a contented man. We have made happiness and contentment to be something outside of ourselves. In the text are three paradoxes. I. A GOOD MAN. Goodness is an internal quality. The good man is whole within, sound within. Hence his satisfaction; all health is within. Piety has its own internal resources and powers. There is a pretty story told of a king, Shah Abbas, who in his travels met with a shepherd. He found him to be so wise that he elevated him to great power: he became a great statesman. But it was discovered, many years after, that he frequently went to a lonely house, of which he kept the key; there it was supposed he kept his treasure; nay, it was supposed that there he hatched schemes against his royal master; thither, it was thought, traitors might resort. The whispering courtiers persuaded the king to break open the door, in order that all the villainy may be laid bare, and there was found an empty room, save that his shepherd's wallet and staff, and crook, and old coat were there. "Hither," said he, "I come, in order that if I ever am tempted to think more highly of myself than I ought to think, I may be rebuked by remembering my origin, and what my rise has done for me." Contentment is containment; the idea in it is that of having learned the lesson of self-sufficing and self-sustaining. Contentment is a sense of possession; a sense of satisfied want. II. A MAN SATISFIED. The lives of most men are passed in fretfulness. To fret is to fray out; fretfulness wears life threadbare. Contentment is the science of thankfulness. The causes of discontent are idleness, living to no purpose. It is only in self-occupation that we have self-possession. III. THE SOURCE OF THE SATISFACTION. "From himself." 1. The holy man is satisfied with the object and foundation of

his faith. 2. In the evidence of his religion. 3. In the ordinances of the sanctuary. 4. In the law of life. 5. In the apportionment and destiny of the world. There may be four replies to the question, Are you satisfied? (1) I am. Not with myself, but from myself. I find my happiness within. (2) I am not. Religion is to me not rest, but unrest; it is described to me now principally by unsatisfied appetites. (3) I try to persuade myself that I am, but I am not; it is all so fading, so fleeting. I could be satisfied, could we continue here. (4) I am. Extremes meet—I am. I see no reason for anxiety, and my business and my pleasures, they suffice for me. But what you call satisfaction I call death. There is not one ray of happiness, properly, from yourselves; all is borrowed, and all is illusion. If you do not find the true contentment on the earth, you will find it nowhere. (*E. Paxton Hood.*) *A good man, or moral excellence*:—What is a good man? What is goodness in man? A thing is good in the sense of being adapted for a certain end, which may be supposed to be the object of its existence. Good is the right direction of power and capacity in anything and everything. Evil is the wrong direction, or the abuse of power and capacity. Evil is possible through the liberty of the creature, wherein any and every power can be used or abused—rightly or wrongly directed. Evil is possible only through the freedom of the creature; it extends just as far as that freedom extends; and it consists in a misdirection and abuse of the powers that are essentially good, as given by God. A good man is simply a man who so uses all the powers God has put within his reach that they shall most perfectly answer the end God designed. We have, to guide us towards and in the right direction of all powers, these three principles: 1. That everything be done for the highest good of mankind generally, or of other men, not for self. 2. That it be done in the best, most perfect manner possible to the doer. 3. That in doing it, we recognise that universal design of a Father's love under which the well-being of any creature, and of the whole universe, is possible. He whose life embodies these principles is a good man. Good and bad men are not born such, nor made such by external power. They become such freely. How universal is the application of this principle! Every single thing that a man does involves either the use or abuse of some power that he possesses. The great good of man is ever inward, intellectual, spiritual. The main element of power will be, that the good man is seeking to reach some ideal of life, the source of his inspiration, and the object of his most ambitious hopes. (*S. Eager, B.A.*) *The good man satisfied from himself*:—This sentiment sounds more akin to the proud spirit of the stoical philosophy than the humble spirit of revealed religion. That philosophy taught its disciples to aspire after an absolute and universal independence. It insisted that the "wise man" should not look abroad for happiness in any direction, but find it in himself absolutely. Scripture seeks to make men independent in a way that is possible, and by means that are good. Man, as a finite creature, must always be dependent. He cannot revolve upon his own centre, and look abroad for nothing. God only is self-existent and self-sufficing. Who needs to be told that mankind generally do not find happiness by searching for it in their own bosoms? This text does not teach that a good man's happiness is enjoyed in absolute independence of all created things, much less of the one Uncreated. Nor does it teach that he is called on to deny himself the moderate use of such things as Providence may put within his reach, and to which his nature is adapted. It simply teaches that the good man is satisfied from himself, in opposition to outward, temporal blessings as chief, indispensable, and absolute grounds of support. The souls of God's real servants are made His habitation through the Spirit, and this indwelling is attended with a peace which the world can neither give nor take away. The witness of the Spirit of God to the spirit of man essentially involves happiness—a happiness which is independent of all things else, and which is enjoyed, both spontaneously and on reflection. Those dispositions and habits which are the fruits of the Spirit make the human soul a treasure-house of happiness, and render their possessor to a great degree independent of all created things; but this same happiness may be made a subject of reflection, and be heightened by it. The gift of the Spirit in a man, the testimony of the Spirit to a man, the fruits of the Spirit upon a man, these things are internal and exhaustless. A man so favoured and endowed is satisfied from himself, for various reasons—because he is not tormented with apprehensions of God's wealth; because he is more or less delivered from the dominion of the passions which embitter human life; because he has acquired tastes and tempers which essentially and spontaneously produce peace and joy; because

reflection on what has been done for him and in him is a further source of comfort; and because he has a positive hope full of immortality, which cheers him in every trial, and burns brighter and brighter as the darkness of outward tribulation thickens around him. What is thus set forth as doctrine has been thousands of times realised in human experience. God's people have often been found maintaining a marvellous independence by simply depending upon God, and to have been satisfied with themselves because God was in them. Enoch, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Daniel, Paul, and John. At the best, human life is a chequered thing. With the good, evil is everywhere mingled—largely mingled. Every heart knows its own bitterness, and every heart has its own. It is clear that if happiness and satisfaction are to be found at all, they must be found within. (*W. Sparrow, D.D.*) *The good man's self-satisfaction*:—The parallelism of this verse is an illustration of the great law of sowing and reaping. Now we take the good man and the satisfaction flowing from himself. There must be some people in the world whom we rightly call good men. The phrase is a frequent one in the Scriptures. In our Lord's teachings we are directed both to the origin and end, the source and manifestation, of goodness. He says, "Purify the inward life; put the heart right, for 'out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.'" Observe the difference between the good man of the Bible and the good man of society. The good man of the Bible is a man of religious faith and devotion, of communion with God, and sanctity of heart; and this Divine element flowing downwards, and working outwardly, produces the manifestations of equity, benevolence, industry, prudence, and all "holy conversation and godliness." The good man of the world builds uphill from the earth. He attends to the personal virtues from a consideration of their tendency to benefit him; from self-respect, from contempt of vice, or dread of its evil consequences. He cultivates the social virtues from calculation, or from amiable sentiment and disposition. But in all this he builds upward—he stands upon the earth, and never gets into that higher region in which the goodness of the good men of the Bible begins. Virtue is not holiness. They differ from each other in nature, origin, and end. 1. The satisfaction of the good man arises from the circumstance that he is regulated in his character and conduct by a fixed and stable thing—by principle. The question with him is, What is duty? What is due to God? He does not live by impulse; he is not moved by passion; he is not ruled by circumstances; he does not act to secure any temporary object. These things would make any man miserable, if his satisfaction were to arise from them. In the midst of his activity the good man's satisfaction arises from himself—from the consciousness that he acts upon principle and in the sight of God. 2. The sentiment may be illustrated by the contrast which is often exhibited between the good man and the wicked, when the latter is called upon to eat the fruit of his own ways. We frequently find that a man has brought himself by his folly and sin—by extravagance, imprudence, and passion—into a condition of perfect thralldom, and perhaps of peril, from which it is impossible to liberate himself. The man has brought such wretchedness into his heart, such poverty and distress upon his family, is so tied and bound by the consequences of his own conduct, that he has no power to help himself, and if relieved at all, it must be by the interference of others, and at the expense of his own character. Now, in a case like that, the man so relieved is satisfied; but he is not "satisfied from himself." The good man, on the contrary, is not only preserved from such pain and wretchedness, but is placed in circumstances, the result of a wise and holy course of conduct, as to be able to help others. 3. The satisfaction of a good man arises from his being preserved from the sting and reproach of an evil conscience. This is somewhat of a negative expression, but it is a great and positive blessing. It is something a man has not—that is, he has not a disturbed, pained, and lacerated conscience. 4. Consider also the positive and increasing pleasure, the growing delight, of the good man's soul. It is not wrong for a man to reflect with grateful complacency upon actions that are good. A man who has lived a life of active goodness, and can reflect on a long series of deeds that will bear reflection, has a source of essentially high, and pure, and profound satisfaction within him. Lessons from this theme: 1. The subject, properly understood, is in exact harmony with evangelical truth. 2. It is important to examine our condition, and the relationship we sustain to God and goodness. 3. If by God's grace men have been brought into a state of harmony with God and all that is good, and if their life, inward and outward, is in such harmony that it is ministering,

as it were, to their souls a secret blessed satisfaction, they should be very careful not to put the harp out of tune. Good men, Christian men, by giving way to temptation, by committing sin, have interfered with the harmonious movements of their life, and got out of health. 4. Learn to have a noble and manly view of life. Live for duty, not for pleasure; for principle, not for expediency; for the approbation of God, not for the praise of men. Let us think not about immediate and temporal, but ultimate and external results. (*T. Binney.*)

The self-sufficient life (with John iv. 14):—Why put these clauses together? Surely you will say, "To illustrate a truth by way of contrast": for does the one not point to a man who is satisfied from the fountain of a human morality, while the other views an indwelling Christ as the spring of ceaseless satisfaction? The words of Christ are an exegesis of Solomon's words. Both proclaim the self-sufficiency of the spiritual life. Our subject is the self-sufficient life. I. IT ARISES FROM ITS INWARDNESS. Solomon says a good man is satisfied from "himself"; Christ that the water He gives is "in him." But what is the living water which Christ gives? Christ tells us it is eternal life. The fountain itself is Jesus "glorified in the heart by the Holy Ghost." Note the inwardness of the "Well"—"from himself" says Solomon, "in him" says Christ. But where? In what part of man does Christ dwell? At the moment of regeneration Christ enters the deepest being of man—enters that which underlies all faculties—changes it; makes it His Holy of Holies, and from it works through the whole range of man's nature. Christ dwells in man—in that mysterious something which transcends consciousness—which thinks, loves, imagines, wills. This seat of Christ in the regenerate, underneath the faculties of the man, explains how he possesses ceaseless happiness, undisturbed peace, unbroken tranquillities. II. IT ARISES FROM ITS SELF-ACTIVITY. Look at the "Well." This is Christ Himself, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily—i.e., the unlimited attributes and life of the Godhead—all grace, all glory, all power. This Divine Well is not like the pool of Bethesda, whose stagnant waters had to be stirred by an angel's hand before they could live with virtue and healing power. The fulness of Jesus Christ in a man is a living fulness. It is eternally alive. The water springs up. This suggests two ideas. 1. It brings this life before us not as mere water that springs up, but as life, a living thing, which, like all other kinds of life, takes to itself an organism, and builds itself up by the law of evolution and development, until it reaches the maturity of its being. 2. Note the goal of its movement—the point toward which it unfolds itself—springs up, not to the world, but up into everlasting life. Still the water, its satisfying element, is independent of the world. All along it has been so. Christ, the fountain, is eternally active. The water springs up in itself, and its final point is eternal life. We must not, however, suppose with some that this life becomes eternal, as if at first it was mortal, might die; but at some point became eternal. No. It is eternal in its germ, eternal in its initial developments. The idea of our text is quite different. It is a life which, not having its source on earth, obeys a law of nature, and seeks its original source in heaven. Man, originally formed in the image of God, seeks reunion with Him. III. IT ARISES FROM ITS POWER TO SATISFY MAN. This is a fact of life—felt according to the spirituality of the man, the depth and riches of his Christ-experience. This lone widow, stripped of all, so utterly destitute that she has nothing to compete with Christ in her, has a joy unspeakable and full of glory. This sweet, saintly spirit, who for long has lain upon a bed of pain and sickness, who for years has seen neither grass grow nor flower bloom, who lives in that garret amid the dust and noise of the great city, has Christ in her heart, a well of water—a satisfaction, a perfect joy. The salt waters of trial and sorrow, and toil and loss may overflow us, but down in the regenerate part of man is a well of water—fresh, sweet, living, always springing up. This is the joy and peace that lie beyond the touch of time. (*Hugh Mair.*)

Happiness not dependent upon our external circumstances:—The text is not intended to deny that external circumstances have considerable influence over our happiness. The sentiment is not to be taken as describing the actual condition of society. The happiness of the great mass of mankind is dependent upon external circumstances. The question before us does not lie between the influence of outward circumstances on the one hand and Divine control on the other. The text does not assert the good man's independence of God. I. TWO GREAT PRINCIPLES OF HAPPINESS, or ingredients of which it is composed. 1. Peace of mind. Unless the mind is in a state of quietude and peace there cannot be happiness. And peace is communicated to the spirit in a direct and glorious manner through

Divine influence. 2. Expectation. Looking forward to something that we possess not. II. THE SUPERIORITY OF THESE PRINCIPLES TO OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES. 1. God has not chosen outward circumstances as the medium through which He imparts these elements of happiness to the mind. 2. God has so ordered it in the economy of grace that man is the intelligent and voluntary agent in the application of these elements of happiness to his own case. 3. Whenever our minds are under the influence of the highest principles of happiness they are not only independent of circumstances, but actually exercise a control over them. (*A. G. Fuller.*) *How a man's conduct comes home to him*:—Men are affected by the course they pursue; for good or bad their conduct comes home to them. The fulness of the backslider's misery will come out of his own ways, and the fulness of the good man's content will spring out of the love of God which is shed abroad in his heart.

I. THE BACKSLIDER. This class includes—1. Apostates. Those who unite themselves with the Church of Christ and for a time act as if they were subjects of a real change of heart. Then they break away and return back to their worldliness. Such was Judas. 2. Those who go into open sin. Men who descend from purity to careless living, and from careless living to indulgence of the flesh. 3. Those who, in any measure or degree, even for a very little time, decline from the point which they have reached. Note the word "backslider." He is not a back-runner, nor a back-leaper, but a back-slider; he slides back with an easy, effortless motion, softly, quietly, perhaps unsuspected by himself or anybody else. Nobody ever slides up. The Christian life is a climbing. If you would know how to back-slide, the answer is, "Leave off going forward and you will slide backward." Note that this is a backslider in heart. All backsliding begins within, begins with the heart's growing lukewarm. What is the backslider's history? "He shall be filled with his own ways." The first kind of fulness is absorption in his carnal pursuits. Then they begin to pride themselves upon their condition and to glory in their shame. Presently the backslider encounters chastisement, and that from a rod of his own making. A fourth stage is at last reached by gracious men and women. They become satiated and dissatisfied, miserable and discontented.

II. THE GOOD MAN. His name and history. The text does not say he is satisfied with himself. No truly good man is ever self-satisfied. The good man is satisfied from himself. A good man is on the side of good. He who truly loves that which is good must be in measure good himself. A good man is "satisfied from himself" because he is independent of outward circumstances, and of the praise of others. The Christian man is content with the well of upspringing water of life which the Lord has placed within him. Faith is in the good man's heart, and he is satisfied with what faith brings him. Pardon, adoption, conquest over temptation, everything he requires. Hope and love are in the good man's heart. When the good man is enabled by Divine grace to live in obedience to God, he must, as a necessary consequence, enjoy peace of mind. He who takes the yoke of Christ upon him, and learns of Him, finds rest unto his soul. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A good man satisfied from himself*:—That virtue is its own reward, and alone sufficient to a happy life, was an opinion in great esteem among ancient philosophers. Scripture confirms the position that a virtuous life is the best course we can take to secure our happiness. But the philosophers went much farther in their commendations of virtue. They made their virtuous man, not only regardless, but even insensible of everything that concerned the body and this life. This was talking beyond the reach of human nature. Religion, which is our reasonable service, and treats us like men, does not require unreasonable things of us. It does not pretend to make us insensible of evils, nor prohibit the use of all lawful means to prevent or remove them. Religion lays the best foundation for our happiness in this world by prescribing such rules as, if we observe them, will enable us either to avoid these temporal evils, or will support us under them. The good man will have more pleasure in the good things of this life and less of the evils than the wicked. Besides which, he has enjoyments peculiar to himself which the sinner is a perfect stranger to. 1. A good man is most likely to escape the evils and calamities of life and to pass through this world the freest from troubles and vexations. His virtues will be a natural defence and security to him against many evils and miseries which would otherwise befall him. Most of the things which embitter human life arise from their faults and follies, their unreasonable lusts, and unruly passions. The good man places his happiness in the favour of God and the sense of his own integrity. He desires no more than he wants; and he wants no more than he can use and enjoy; and this reduces his

necessities to a narrow compass. He bears an universal good-will to all mankind and is always ready to do all the good he can to others. He is sober and temperate in all his pleasures and enjoyments; and this upon a principle of religion and virtue. 2. Whatever calamities or afflictions befall a good man he will bear them much better than other people. Disappointments are not so great to him who takes an estimate of things, not from fancy or opinion, but from truth and reality, and the just weight and moment of them. Though his virtues are not full proof against the strokes of fortune, and cannot ward off every blow, yet they will blunt the edge of afflictions and greatly abate their smart. It is well to consider the uncertainty of all external enjoyments, not to overvalue them, or set our hearts upon them, or place our happiness in them. 3. The good man has pleasures and enjoyments peculiar to himself which will, in a great measure, supply the want of external blessings. Every good and virtuous action we do affords us a double pleasure. It first strikes our minds with a direct pleasure by its suitableness to our nature; and then our minds entertain themselves with pleasant reflections upon it. Learn—(1) It is an unjust reproach to cast upon religion and virtue that they deprive us of joy and comfort and satisfaction. (2) What is the true cause of the trouble and uneasiness which are to be found under the sun. (*L. Abbot.*) *A Christian man of science* :—The happiness of a good man does not depend on the mere surroundings of his life, or the possessions which he can call his own, but on something more vital—on that which is more really his own, and of which no change of circumstances can ever deprive him. The uneducated man cannot find company in himself. He has to look outside himself for enjoyment and satisfaction. The man whose nature has been cultured, especially by self-discipline, is often least alone when most alone, so that when the voices of men are not heard he hears a still, small voice within his heart. Now, goodness is the highest culture, for it is the culture of that which is most spiritual in the nature. Goodness is an inward harmony. Goodness is the most economical thing in the world, for with it men have an inward treasure that renders them, to a large extent, independent of that which is without. Religion is a possession which makes men rich in any position. There need be no commendation of an ascetic order of life, or contempt of the world. But if we are to enjoy even this world, the power to enjoy must be found within, there must be internal harmony, or the world will be a great discord to us. The kingdom of God, that kingdom which Christ declared is “within,” is the great condition of blessedness; aye, it is the condition for enjoying even the kingdom which is temporal and visible. These points illustrated from the life of G. B. Sowerby, F.L.S., author of “*The Saurus Conchyliorum.*” (*W. Garrett Horder.*)

Ver. 15. The simple believeth every word : but the prudent man looketh well to his going.—*Simplicity and prudence* :—Such belief is not to the discredit of the simple man, but to the disgrace of the man who misleads him. No character is more admirable than that which is marked by simplicity and consequent trustfulness; it is only because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, and the courses of this world are so much out of line, that simplicity is not only undervalued, but sometimes condemned. The prudent man is put in apposition to indicate that he is a man of affairs, who understands a good deal of the ways of the world, and who looks below the surface to find real meanings; this kind of prudence is itself an affirmation of the wickedness of the world: prudence in itself may or may not be a virtue; everything depends upon its origin and its purpose: when a man is so prudent as to suspect everybody, to regard every word as a trap, and every proposition as a lure to destruction, his prudence simply signifies that he has found out that he is in a bad world, and that everything is to be examined with a view to detecting in it the spirit of selfishness and all evil. Whether simplicity or prudence would in the long run the more prevail cannot now be told, because no fair test can be applied. Certainly Jesus Christ would seem to teach that simplicity is better than wariness, and that trustfulness is nearer to the Spirit of God than is suspicion. It is right to understand the men by whom we are surrounded, and to obtain some notion of their spirit and purpose, in order that we may conduct ourselves aright towards them. This is what God Himself does: to the froward He shows Himself froward; to the meek He is all gentleness; to the trustful He is all grace. There are men who pride themselves upon their prudence, not knowing that their prudence may have been gained through an experience which has cost them dearly, and which has revealed in many instances their folly

and their incompetence. The prudence of the wise man will be placed at the disposal of the simple, and will not be wholly devoted to the confounding of those whose intentions are evil. Wherever one man is wiser than another he is a debtor to the man who is not so wise, and is bound to pay him of the gold of wisdom, that the man may be able to manage his affairs in the world with discretion and success. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The credulous and the cautious*.—I. THE HASTILY CREDULOUS. "The simple believeth every word." 1. One of the strongest tendencies in man's mental nature is his propensity to believe. It is one of the most voracious appetites of the soul. The child opens its mental mouth, hungering for tales from the nurse's lips, and will eagerly swallow up everything that is said. (1) This propensity to believe implies a state of society that does not exist. Were men born into heaven, were society free from all error and deception, it would be not only right, but a beneficial thing to believe every word, and to confide in every character. This is the state of society for which man was created, but he has lost it. He comes into a world of lies. (2) This propensity to believe explains the reign of priesthood. (3) This propensity to believe shows the easiness of the condition on which God has made the salvation of man to depend. "He that believeth shall be saved." 2. The thoughtless yielding to this tendency is an immense loss. "The fool rageth, and is confident." The fool sees no danger, dreads no harm. He rushes recklessly forward into mischief. (1) He is passionate. "He rageth." Counsels and warnings only irritate him. (2) He is stubborn. He "is confident." What does he care about your warnings? Nothing. (3) He is foolish. "He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly, and he inherits folly." (4) He is despised. A man of wicked devices is hated. The man who has given way to his credulity becomes all this. He is passionate, ignorant of the grounds of his belief, he cannot brook contradiction, his opinions being prejudices, he is stubborn in holding them, and in all this he is "foolish" and "hated." II. THE CAUTIOUSLY BELIEVING. "The prudent man looketh well to his going." True prudence is indicated by two things. 1. A dread of evil. "A wise man feareth." True dread of evil is consistent with true courage. Few, if any, displayed more heroism than Noah, yet, being moved by fear, he prepared an ark. Evil, both physical and moral, is a bad thing in the universe, and it is right to dread it, as we dread poisonous serpents and ravenous beasts. True prudence is indicated—2. By a departure from evil. "He departeth from evil." Moral evil is the heart of all evil, and this he forsakes. He shuns it as an enemy to God and the universe. The prudence is indicated—3. By mental greatness. He is dignified with knowledge. He is "crowned with knowledge." Caution in believing is necessary for three reasons. (1) The strength of man's tendency to believe. (2) The prevalence of error in society. (3) The damaging influence of falsehood on the soul. (*Homilist.*) *Prudent going*.—"Why are you treading so carefully?" said a donkey to a heavily laden horse. "You'll never get home at that rate." "Do you want to know?" was the answer; "it is because I remember there's a stone on the road somewhere about here. I stumbled over it this morning on my way to work, and I don't mean to have another fall this evening." (*Mrs. Prosser.*)

Ver. 17. **He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly.**—*Anger restrained*.—In speaking recently of the power of God's grace to quell our passions, Mr. Aitken told the story of a gentleman he knew in Liverpool, who, although a follower of the Lord Jesus, was cursed with a hasty and violent temper. It was a source of great grief to him, and in his helplessness he threw himself on the Lord's hands to rid him of this demon which was marring his Christian happiness. He occupied a position of trust in the Custom House, and it was his duty each night to see that every door in the building was locked. One evening he had just gone through his work as usual and was well on his way homewards, when a boy came rushing after him and told him a man was locked up in one of the inner rooms of the Custom House. At the moment he felt anger rising in his throat, but, lifting up his heart to God, he returned with the boy. After unlocking room after room he came to the place where the man was, and found the poor fellow standing trembling, no doubt expecting an outburst of that temper which they all knew so well. The Customs officer approached the man smiling, and, stretching out his hand, told him not to mind the trouble he had given him. Thus does God's grace enable us to quell our worst passions.

Ver. 20. **But the rich hath many friends.**—*Friends in prosperity*.—Ah! do not

be puffed up by any of the successes of this life, do not be spoiled by the number of liveried coachmen that may stop at your door, or the sweep of the long trail across the imported tapestry. Many of those who come to your house are fawning parasites. They are not so much in love with you as they are in love with your house and your successes. You move down to 320, Low Water Mark Street, and see how many of their carriages will halt at your door. Now you can hardly count those brilliant carriages on your ten fingers, but you move next year down to 320 in Low Water Mark Street, and you can count them all on your nose! Timon of Athens was a wealthy lord, and all the mighty men and women of the land came and sat at his banquet, proud to sit there, and they drank deep to his health. They sent him costly presents. He sent costlier presents back again, and there was no man in all the land so admired as Timon of Athens, the wealthy lord. But after a while, through lavish hospitality or through betrayal, he lost everything. Then he sent for help to those lords whom he had banqueted and to whom he had given large sums of money—Lucullus, Lucius, Sempronius, and Ventidias. Did those lords send any help to him? Oh, no. Lucullus said when he was applied to, "Well, I thought that Timon would come down; he was too lavish; let him suffer for his recklessness." Lucius said, "I would be very glad to help Timon, but I have made large purchases and my means are all absorbed." And one lord sent one excuse, and another lord sent another excuse. But to the astonishment of everybody, after awhile Timon proclaimed another feast. These lords said to themselves, "Why, either Timon has had a good turn of fortune or he has been deceiving us—testing our love." And so they all flocked to the banquet, apologetic for seeming lukewarmness. The guests were all seated at the table, and Timon ordered the covers to be lifted. The covers lifted, there was nothing under them but smoking hot water. Then Timon said to the guests, "Dogs, lap! Lap, dogs!" And under the terrible irony they fled the room, while Timon pursued them with his anathema, calling them fools of fortune, destroyers of happiness under a mask, hurling at the same time the pictures and the chalices after them. Oh, I would not want to make you over-suspicious in the days of your success; but I want you to understand right well there is a vast difference between the popularity of Timon the prosperous and Timon the unfortunate. I want you to know there is a vast difference in the number of people who admire a man when he is going up and the number of people who admire him when he is going down. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 21. He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.—*London poverty* :—The problems presented by poverty are recurrent. Wisdom as well as courage is required by those who would confront them successfully. Civilisation tends to the separation of men, but Christianity can bring them together till they constitute a true brotherhood, in which the strong shall help to bear the burdens which are crushing the weak. It is a wholesome sign that such questions as this are being more closely considered, and more boldly treated than they formerly were, especially by Christian people. If dogmatic Christianity seems weaker, practical Christianity is stronger. There is, undoubtedly, much to discourage pity when we attempt to know the condition of the poor, and to do them service for Christ's sake. We meet with improvidence, drink, and imposture. We do not palliate such wickedness and folly, but would use it rather as an argument for "considering" the poor, for discriminating between things that differ, so that pity and generosity may flow in the right direction. Scripture lays down the principles which should guide us. Under Judaism the enactments which tended to prevent or relieve poverty are very prominent. The privileges of gleaners, the precepts which forbade the withholding of wages, and the laws against usury, are specimens. The Year of Jubilee was a remarkable social institution. That year poverty was suffered to put forth its claims in God's name, and was sure of a fair hearing. Judaism did but foreshadow the work of Jesus, who came to establish righteousness, and to proclaim brotherhood between men and between nations. He was listened to most eagerly by the poor. He was born among them, was all through His life one of them—understood their habits and feelings, was at home in their houses, and taught truth in a way that they could comprehend. We admit that we cannot reach an ideal state of society in the world so long as sin exists. But we are not to fold our hands—waiting for a coming millennium—thinking that of necessity things must be as they are. Christ our Saviour is the world's rightful king, and He means to conquer it for Himself, through the righteousness and mercifulness of His people. Still, the law of love

holds good, and if we follow our Lord, we shall go forth to seek and to save those that are lost. And they need saving—from misery, from degradation, and from despair. Consideration of the moral effects of poverty will lead us to deeper pity of the poor. A poor man has not the gracious home influence that most of us enjoy. The temptation to envy must come with tremendous power to a poor man. What can be done to alter for the better a state of things which every Christian ought to think of pitifully and prayerfully? We have something to do in forming public opinion on this question, so that anything which is within the sphere of legislation may be done. Charity also has its claims upon our thoughts and generosity. And above all, the good news of the Kingdom is needed of these our brethren. (*A. Rowland, LL.B., B.A.*)

Ver. 22. Do they not err that devise evil?—*The grievous error of devising evil*.—How difficult is the task to convince any human being that he has mistaken the road to happiness! He would say, "No man can judge for another what is best suited to his nature and temperament in the way of enjoying life." And if man had no other law to follow in the pursuit of happiness than the dictates of his own will, this reasoning would be just; and upon indifferent points of minor importance, it still remains unanswerable. But in connection with the moral course and conduct of a man's life, the way has been laid down for him: how he must walk, and where. The wicked would deny that they do "err" at all. 1. The wicked "err" egregiously in imagining for a moment that any man is placed here to be independent of God, and of His commandments. 2. In taking it for granted that they know best what is good for them; that they can tell what will induce to their own comfort and happiness, better than the revealed law of their lives in the Word of God. 3. In conceiving that sin has any real good to confer. 4. The wicked "err" in being intent only on the present. 5. They admit and cherish in their hearts, in opposition to all reason, as well as Scripture, an idea that there will be, after all, a means of escape for them. They thus prove, by their conduct, that they do not use their reason and common sense in this supremely important concern. (*A. B. Evans, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. In all labour there is profit.—*Work*.—The doctrine of the Proverbs is, that what is good for the next world is good for this. He who wishes to go out of this world happily must first go through this world wisely. Men do, to a very great extent, earn for themselves their good or evil fortunes, and are filled with the fruit of their own devices. True religion is a thing which mixes itself up with all the cares and business of this mortal life, this work-day world. "In all labour there is profit." Whatsoever is worth doing, is worth doing well. It is always worth while to take pains. It is a short-sighted mistake to avoid taking trouble, for God has so well ordered this world that industry always repays itself. God has set thee thy work; then fulfil it. Fill it full. Throw thy whole heart and soul into it. Do it carefully, accurately, completely. All neglect, carelessness, slurring over work is a sin; a sin against God, who has called us to our work; a sin against our country and our neighbours, who ought to profit by our work; and a sin against ourselves also, for we ought to be made wiser and better men by our work. Then take pains. Whatever you do, do thoroughly. Whatever you begin, finish. Look upon your work as an honourable calling, and as a blessing to yourselves, not merely as a hard necessity, a burden which must be done. Be sure it will bring its reward with it. Work, hard work, is a blessing to the soul and character of the man who works. Idleness makes a man restless, discontented, greedy, the slave of his own lusts and passions. Being forced to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance and self-control, diligence and strength of will, cheerfulness and content, and a hundred virtues which the idle man will never know. If you wish to see how noble a calling work is, consider God Himself, who, although He is perfect, and does not need, as we do, the training which comes by work, yet works for ever with and through His Son Jesus Christ, who said, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Think of God as a King working for ever for the good of His subjects, a Father working for ever for the good of His children, for ever sending forth light, and life, and happiness to all created things, and ordering all things in heaven and earth by a providence so perfect that not a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge, and the very hairs of your head are all numbered. And then think of yourselves, called to copy God, each in his station, and to be fellow-workers with God for the good of each other and of ourselves. Called to

work because you are made in God's image, and redeemed to be the children of God. (*C. Kingsley, M.A.*) *Labour better than talk*:—Sometimes it is difficult to see where the profit is. We speak of having spent our strength for nought, of having run in vain, of having brought the day to a close without having filled our arms with sheaves. There is, however, a sense in which all labour ends in advantage: it is so in learning, in study, in the prosecution of art, in devotion to business, in the study of character, indeed, throughout the whole circle of human thought and occupation. A man may write much, and may throw his writing away because it does not fulfil his expectation or purpose, yet the very act of having written it has been as a discipline to the writer, has stirred his faculties, and by even revealing weakness has prepared the way for the cultivation of strength. Every time the arm is lifted the muscles are improved. Every time the fresh air is breathed a blessing of healthfulness is left behind. Labour means industry, devotion, conscientious attention to affairs that demand our interest: it is set in apposition to the talk of the lips—mere breathing, mere foaming, mere boasting, wordy declarations of great programmes which are never brought to realisation. The teaching of the text would seem to be that labour brings wealth, and mere talk brings penury. If this is so the law is obviously just and good. Society would no longer be consolidated and secure if mere talk brought men to honour and wealth and solidity of position. In all society the labourers must be more in number than the talkers. Understand that nothing is here said against talk; society cannot do without speech; eloquence has a great part to play in the education of the world; what is spoken against is the talk of the lips—that is, mere talk, talking for talking's sake, love of hearing one's self speak, talking with the lips when the heart is taking no part in the communication: when a man truly talks his intellect, his heart, his conscience, his judgment, his whole being speaks; every word is marked by sacredness of purpose, every promise is a vow, every declaration binds the soul. It must not be understood that anything whatever is said in disparagement of talk, speech, eloquence; we must again and again remind ourselves that the talk that is condemned is formal, mechanical, labial, taking nothing of virtue out of the speaker, and communicating nothing of strength to the hearer. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Labour, talk, wealth*:—I. PROFITABLE LABOUR. "In all labour there is profit." The word "all" here of course must be taken with limitation. Ill-directed labour is not profitable. 1. Labour is profitable to our physical health. 2. Labour is profitable to our character. It conduces to force of thought, energy of will, power of endurance, capacity of application. 3. Labour is profitable to our social comforts. By labour, honest, well-directed labour, man gets not only the necessities, but the comforts, the luxuries, the elegances, and the elevated positions of life. There is no true labour that is vain. II. IMPOVERISHING TALK. "The talk of the lips tendeth only to penury." All talk does not tend to penury. There is a talk that is profitable. The talk of the preacher, the lecturer, the statesman, the barrister, more often tend to affluence than to penury. Sir Walter Raleigh says, "He that is lavish in words is a niggard indeed. The shuttle, the needle, the spade, the brush, the chisel, all are still but the tongue." III. DIGNIFYING WEALTH. "The crown of the wise is their riches." The idea is, that a wise man would so use his wealth that it will become a crown to him. By using it to promote his own mental and spiritual cultivation, and to ameliorate the woes and to augment the happiness of the world, his wealth gives him a diadem more lustrous far than all the diamond crowns of kings. But the foolishness of fools is folly. This looked at antithetically means that the wealth of a fool adds no dignity to his character. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Industry in religion*:—I. THE USELESSNESS OF A RELIGION WHICH IS MERELY VERBAL. 1. Do not misunderstand this. Gift of speech is from God. He is to be obeyed and honoured by it. Religion is to be verbal. Confess Christ. Exhort one another. Rebuke sin. Sing psalms and hymns. By our words we shall be justified or condemned. 2. But a merely verbal religion is useless. We may call Christ, Master and Lord, and disobey Him. We may dispute on religious subjects, and be without religion itself. II. THE NECESSITY AND ADVANTAGE OF PRACTICAL INDUSTRY IN RELIGION. 1. The Bible often speaks of spiritual "labour." 2. "In all" such "labour there is profit." The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Resist the devil, and he shall flee from you. God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love. 1. Your present interest calls you to it. There is a gathering before the final harvest; and they who sow plentifully shall gather plentifully. 2. Can you be too active in His service who has done so great things for you? 3. Nor forget the

punishment threatened to apostasy. 4. Keep in mind the reward promised. 5. Be solemnly impressed with the greatness of the work, and the brevity and uncertainty of time. (*G. Cubitt.*) *Restful work*:—1. Am I wrong in thinking that most of us take our religion much too easily? Where is the "labour"? Where is the difficult part? And yet a religious life is always set before us as a very difficult thing—**Work.** "Work while it is day." "Go work in My vineyard." "Strive to enter in." "We labour to enter into the rest." We get up in the morning, and we say a prayer, and perhaps read a few verses in the Bible, or some religious book, before we leave our room. During the day, we have one or two religious thoughts. Perhaps we do some act of kindness which costs us very little, and which we do with a very mixed motive. Am I understating the religion of your day? or am I overstating it? But does it correspond with the description which the Bible gives of a religious life? Does this satisfy the requirements of God? Is your conscience satisfied? Where is the self-denial? Where is the "labour"? Was this Christ's life? 2. Why do you find your religion such a tame thing? Why do you make such a little progress? Why have not you the enthusiasm which some have? Why is your religion unattractive to other people? It wants "labour." Nothing will restore that neglected field but hard work. Digging, tilling, watering, fencing, weeding, burning, that restores a field! True, it is all of grace. God must give the sunshine, and you must spread the seed to receive it. Let any farmer say what is the secret of fertilising his land. "Labour." Let every man of great learning and high intellectual power say where is the secret of his great knowledge and mental power. He would say, "Fag." Let every experienced Christian say what has made him what he is. He will say, "Labour; hard work." "In all labour there is profit." 3. The "labour" may differ in different persons. A woman's work is very different to a man's. The work of one class of society may be chiefly manual; but God makes His unity out of man's diversity. I would that you would invest in "labour." If you wish to lead a happy life, you will never find it in what you are to get, but you will find it in what you are to give. Get out of this pointless, easy-going, unsatisfying, useless life. Let me go with you a step or two. In the morning do not waste your time in bed, but wake early to the realities of life. Try to begin with a good thought. Discipline yourself, even in dressing. Take pains with your morning prayer. Have some arrangement. Stop the first wandering thought. And when you read your Bible, go deep. Look for inner meanings. All the day long, remember your own particular danger, and be on your guard about it. Try to raise your own and others' conversation to a higher level. Set to yourself in life some special work which you believe God calls you to do. It may be for the poor, for the suffering, for the school, for the sick, for the heathen, for the Church, for Christ. And remember, whatever is worth doing at all is worth doing well. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Work lives when we are gone*:—Lord Shaftesbury, in one of his speeches, gave an admirable concluding piece of advice to all Christian workers—I trust that you will persevere, and by God's blessing double and redouble your efforts. You cannot do better than take the saying that appears in one of Sir Walter Scott's tales. An old Scotchman sends for his son, and says to him, "Be aye stickin' in a tree, John; it'll be dein guid to the world when you and I are gane." *Labour a panacea for trouble*:—Life is full of trouble, and we must shoulder our share with the best grace we can. We may only seek to lighten it, for to avoid it is impossible. There is one sovereign panacea, however—work. Brooding over trouble is like surrounding oneself with a fog, it magnifies all objects seen through it. Occupation of the mind prevents this; any hard work, manual work even, gives the mind other matters of concern, and also tires the body so as to ensure sleep. He who knows that power is inborn, that people are weak because they look for good out of circumstances instead of themselves, throws himself upon his own personality, and stands in an erect position, commands his limbs, and succeeds in achievements, because he perceives it lies with himself to strengthen and develop his faculties. *Profit in all labour*:—In an article on "The lady who does her own work," Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe dwells on the value of housework in giving the very healthiest form of exercise, and for the average woman shows it to be far preferable to the work of the masseurs, who, even in those days, more than thirty years ago, seem to have found plenty of patients. "Would it not be quite as cheerful and less expensive a process," she asks, "if young girls from early life developed the muscles in sweeping, dusting, ironing, rubbing furniture, and all the multiplied domestic processes which our grandmothers knew of?" and then adds: "I will venture to say that

our grandmothers in a week went over every movement that any gymnast has invented, and went over them to some productive purpose, too." Here is a hint that women with thin arms would do well to take. It is said to be really a fact that Clara Louise Kellogg, the singer, when a young girl, was much annoyed by the attenuated appearance of her arms when she began to don evening dress at her crowded concerts. Some one recommended a brisk use of the broom, which advice she followed, and soon had a round, plump member as the reward of her labour. If a thin, listless girl, with a dull eye and stare, can by any means be persuaded to try the "broom cure," she will be astonished to find what a beautifier it really is.

Ver. 26. In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and His children shall have a place of refuge.—*Godly fear and its goodly consequence*:—Has it never surprised you that there should be such sentences as these in the Book of inspiration—secular proverbs interspersed with spiritual proverbs—the secular and the spiritual all put together without any division or classification. The hard and fast line which is made to divide the secular from the religious is fraught with innumerable injuries. I. **WHAT IS THIS FEAR OF THE LORD?** Fear stands for true godliness. It is a short way of expressing real faith, hope, love, holiness of living, and every grace. There is a something more tender, more touching, more real about fear than there is about some people's faith, which faith may very readily verge upon presumption. But in speaking of fear we must always discriminate. There is a fear with which a Christian has nothing to do. What is the fear that a well-ordered, well-disciplined, beloved child has of his own father? 1. He has an awe of him which arises out of admiration of his character. 2. He is sure to be very deferential in his father's presence. 3. He fears at any time to intrude upon his father's prerogative. 4. He dreads everything which might cause his father's displeasure. II. **WHEREIN IS THE CONFIDENCE OF GODLY FEAR SEEN?** The history of men that have feared God may enlighten us on this matter, *e.g.*, Job, Habakkuk. The confidence will not only appear in time of trouble, it will appear also in acts of obedience. The same confidence will develop itself when persecution is involved, and when we have to bear witness to the truth. III. **WHEREUPON IS THIS CONFIDENCE BUILT?** They that fear God know God to be infinitely loving to them, to be immutable and unchangeable, to be unsearchingly wise and omnipotently strong on their behalf; they know that an atonement has been made for their sins, and that the Spirit of God dwells in them. IV. **HOW THIS CONFIDENCE AND THIS FEAR ARE FAVOURED OF GOD.** The promise is, "His children shall have a place of refuge." Those who fear God and have confidence in Him are His children. There is a heaven lying asleep within those words, "His children." For the "place of refuge" finds illustration in Noah, Lot, Israel, Ruth, Elijah, Christians at Pella, &c. Moses Stuart says the text means that the children of those who fear God shall have a place of refuge. And there are many precious texts that speak thus of our children. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Godliness, safety, and life*:—I. **THAT GODLINESS IS SAFETY.** "The fear of the Lord is strong confidence." The godly are safe. God is their Refuge and Strength. They will not fear though the earth be removed. We make three remarks about this refuge. 1. It is a provision against immense dangers. 2. It admits of the greatest freedom of action. A prison is a refuge as well as a fortress. But all in this refuge have ample scope for action. The sphere is as infinite as God. 3. It is accessible at all times and for all persons. Its gates are open day and night. II. **THAT GODLINESS IS LIFE.** The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life. Godliness is a fountain of happiness—salubrious, abundant, perennial. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Strong confidence*:—Fear prevents confidence, and sometimes destroys confidence; but the "fear of the Lord" produces confidence. The text does not say that all godly persons have confidence; some have not, because the body is weak or there is some morbid feeling ruling the heart which should not control the emotions and the affections. Godliness, where it has full play and free scope, will invariably produce confidence. All the confidence of godly persons is not a direct fruit of piety. Some confidence comes from constitutional conditions. It is a matter of temperament. I. **REAL GODLINESS INVOLVES CONFIDENCE TOWARDS GOD.** Because in such a case as this reconciliation with God is complete. Not necessarily the realisation of reconciliation and the fruits and effects of it. If reconciliation in the case of those who fear the Lord be complete, confidence cannot but be restored by such reconciliation. There springs up between them that "fear the Lord and God," that which may be called filial friendship; and in this there is strong confidence. Further, the intercourse of the godly with

heaven is perfectly unfettered. And there is, in the case of those who "fear the Lord," happy dependence; such as that of the babe upon its mother. We are not always to be asking God for an explanation of His doings, we are to trust Him. There is motherhood as truly as fatherhood in God. II. REAL GODLINESS PRODUCES CONFIDENCE TOWARDS MEN. Not impudence; not boldness of the evil kind; but that confidence which is perfectly consistent with deep humility, and which works together with that spirit which is ever ready to put honour on another. Do not mistake this confidence towards men. This confidence is the confidence of conscious uprightness. As in the case of Job. But it is not the self-conceit which says, "Stand by, I am holier than thou." III. THE CONFIDENCE WHICH REAL GODLINESS AWAKENS IS ADAPTED TO ALL CIRCUMSTANCES. In danger it becomes boldness. In duty and work it becomes conscious power. The godly man is not a fatalist. IV. A CONFIDENCE WHICH ABIDES TO THE END. It goes with a man to the uttermost, it carries him right through. It endures because the principles out of which it is established endure. Faith endures. Hope endures. This confidence will be strong enough to do all the work which you, in this world of sin and sorrow, may require from it. Then do not be content without strong confidence. And endeavour to promote this confidence, especially among weak and timid Christians. (*S. Martin, M.A.*) *Fear a confidence*:—Fear is confidence; the words sound strangely. They are strange indeed, but true. To fear God aright is to be delivered from all fear. "His salvation is nigh them that fear Him." To have such a neighbour is strong consolation to a human spirit in this howling wilderness. The fear which brings a sinner submissive and trustful to the sacrifice and righteousness of the Substitute is itself a confidence. The great and terrible God becomes the "dwelling-rock" of the fugitive. (*W. Arnot.*) *The fear of the Lord and its advantages*:—Religion, in the life of a man who regularly lives to God, always appears in an aspect uninteresting and unlovely to the irreligious. And so they speak of it. It is needful, therefore, that religion should be honoured. I. THE HABIT WHICH THE TEXT EXHIBITS. "The fear of the Lord." Fear, in its most comprehensive and general definition, is that emotion arising from the prospect of danger, either real or imaginary. In spiritual things it has a twofold character. 1. Slavish fear, or mere dread of Jehovah in His character as Judge. This fear must not be put in the place of religion. 2. Filial fear. Analogous to the emotion properly exercised by children towards parents; it is exercised by all those who have undergone a redemption from slavish fear and a renovation of heart by the influence of the Divine Spirit. It arises from a deep and humble reverence of the Divine perfections and from a practical desire to walk in obedience to the Divine commandments. It is principally included in the direction of all the affections towards Jehovah and the exhibition of practical religion in the life and conversation. The filial fear of the Lord is by no means inconsistent with the love of the Lord. II. THE ADVANTAGES WHICH THIS MENTAL HABIT ALWAYS AND INVARIABLY SECURES. The fear of God excludes all other fear, and he who has it has a sanctuary in which his soul shall abide in security, and safety, and peace, while looking beyond the scenes of this present life for the perfect enjoyment of interminable and imperishable felicity. Notice three facts embodied in the principle. 1. The fear of the Lord removes the terrors of conscience. Conscience is the judge of a man's mind with regard to a man's own actions. An accusing conscience is one that sets before the spirit of a man the array of his crimes. The fear of the Lord prevents the accusations of conscience and brings the soul into a state of peace. 2. The fear of the Lord removes also the terrors of temporal chastisement. But the chastening of God is always for our profit; and in connection with the profit arising from chastisement there are peculiar comforts. 3. The fear of the Lord removes the terrors of death and of futurity. He who has God for his friend must look, not only without fear, but with hope and joy, to the last moment of dissolution, and his entrance into the mysteries of the awful world of futurity. (*James Parsons.*) *The advantages of religious principle*:—The "fear of the Lord" is here put for all gracious principles, producing gracious practices. 1. Where this reigns it produces a holy security and serenity of mind. 2. It entails a blessing on posterity. 3. It is an overflowing and everflowing spring of comfort and joy. It is a "fountain of life," yielding constant pleasure and satisfaction to the soul. 4. It is a sovereign antidote against sin and temptation. Those that have a true relish of the pleasures of serious godliness will not be allured by the baits of sin to swallow its hook; they know where they can obtain better things than any it can pretend to offer. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The children's place of refuge* (to children):—What

is a place of refuge? In the Isle of Man there is a tower in the sea which is known as "the Tower of Refuge." Just under the waters is a cruel rock, and many a boat has been struck upon it and lost, so the wife of one of the governors has had this tower built, and sailors and fishermen, instead of a dangerous rock, find shelter, a dry room, and something to eat and drink. Who is it in the text who are to have a place of refuge? Not the fathers, not the mothers, but "His children." But who are God's children? Every child that comes into the world is God's child. But it is possible for a little boy or girl to be one of God's children and not know it. If you will give your heart to the Lord God, if you will love Him, you will find out that you are one of God's children. God is often grieved because His boys and girls do not know Him. God is your Father, and He likes to know that you know Him. Now, boys and girls have their troubles. We big people sometimes forget that when little people have little cares they are just as hard for them to bear. If you have troubles you want a place of refuge into which you can escape. The place of refuge for you is the heart of Jesus. If you ask Jesus to let you come He will let you come, and you will know Jesus if you get into His heart. The heart of Jesus is a great heart—it is large enough to take us all in, boys and girls and men and women. And now is the very best time for you to come and find your place of refuge in the heart of Jesus. Remember that your place of refuge is always close to you. Jesus is always willing to hear and willing to answer you. (*W. J. Woods, B.A.*)

Ver. 27. **The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.**—*The fountain of life* :—I. SOMETHING THAT NEEDS REPLENISHING. Life is a fire—it must be kept alight; a lamp—it needs oil; energy—it demands a nervous sustentation. So with spiritual life—it cannot continue without food. II. SOMETHING TO REPLENISH MAN'S LIFE. "The fear of the Lord." Here is rich provender called a "fountain"—continuous, inexhaustible, pure—the source, not the stream. How is it a fountain of life? 1. Because it enables us to assimilate Divine food. 2. Because it is the key which unlocks the tap. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 29. **He that is slow to wrath is of great understanding.**—*Sinful anger* :—The scope of these words is to beat down sinful anger, a common evil, producing much mischief. In them there is—1. The excellency of meekness, and—2. The mischief of passionateness, and the evil thereof. I. THE MAN THAT IS SLOW OF WRATH OR ANGER SHOWS GREAT WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING IN HIS MEEK AND PEACEABLE DISPOSITION AND DEPORTMENT. 1. The nature of wrath or anger in general. Anger or wrath is a passion which is not of itself sinful, but is either good or ill, as it is regulated; and so it differs from fretting, murmuring, and envy, which can never be good or allowable in any case. Anger is a servant to the meek, but a master to the passionate. The passion of anger is like wind to a ship. If there be a dead calm, and the winds blow not at all, or very weakly, the ship does not make way. And if men be so stupid, indolent, and unconcerned, that their spirits will not stir in them, whatever dishonour they see done to God, these are standing still in the way to heaven. If the wind is brisk enough, but yet is contrary, the ship will at best have much ado with it, and may be driven into a shore which the crew desired not to see. So if men's anger be in itself sinful, it cannot fail of an unhappy event, driving the soul into much sin. Though the wind be not contrary, yet if it be too impetuous and violent, it may dash the ship on rocks and split it. Though a man's anger may have a just ground, yet if it prove excessive and boisterous it may run men headlong into great mischiefs. The ingredients of anger are, a commotion or trouble of the spirit, which ariseth from an apprehension of an injury. Hatred, which is bent against the injury apprehended. Grief, on account of the party or parties injured. A desire for the vindication of the right and honour of the injured. Anger is a passion uneasy to one's self, compounded of bitter ingredients and uneasy passions; in which one walks on slippery ground, where he is apt to fall headlong. 2. What is it to be slow of wrath? Being slow to take up anger in one's own cause. Managing it warily, when it is taken up, being guided by the light of reason, and not by the fire of passion, and being easy to lay it down. The more slow that anger burns the easier it is to quench. 3. He who is slow of wrath is of great understanding. Such an one thereby shows his duty to God, his sovereign lord, and to himself. He shows that he understands Satan's diligence and malice against him, his real interest, and human nature. Be slow to wrath. It is a heaven-like disposition. The

comfort of society depends on it. It is necessary for a man's own comfort. It helps to keep ourselves and others from the snare of sin. But there is such a thing as sinful slackness to anger, which may make us omit duties of justice and charity.

II. THE PASSIONATE MAN PROCLAIMS HIS FOLLY AND NAUGHTINESS IN HIS UNBRIDLED PASSION AND SINFUL ANGER. 1. The nature of sinful anger. Anger is sinful when it riseth without a just ground, having no cause for it assigned by grace or right reason as just. It may rise without any cause at all; or vainly, upon some slight or trifling occasion unworthy of such notice. When it keeps no due proportion with the offence. When it is not directed to the honour of God, and the destruction of sin. When it makes no due difference between the offender and the offence. When the effects of it are sinful. When it is kept up and continued beyond due time. 2. The kinds of sinful anger. Sinful in itself; where there is no just ground. Accidentally sinful; when ill-managed. There is an open and impetuous anger called wrath. A pursuing, implacable wrath, called anger, which is set upon revenge. 3. The effects of sinful anger. Mischievous to the body. Fires the tongue in a particular manner. Disturbs society. Overclouds reason. Unfits a man for duty. The passionate man proclaims his folly. He shows himself to be a proud man, a weak man, incapable of ruling himself; an unmortified man; a rash and precipitant man; an unwatchful man. Practical improvement of this subject—Use of humiliation and conviction; of exhortation. Desire of provoking and stirring up others to passion; for God's sake, and for your neighbour's sake, as well as for your own sake. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."

And if at any time you are caught, hasten out of the snare. Dallying with temptation is the fair way to entangle you further; therefore fly from it as from a serpent, lest ye be stung to death thereby. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Religion the restraint of impetuous passion* :—Death is at all times appalling to nature; but never so frightful as when it comes by the hands of the public executioner. To this the text provides an antidote. The man who lives in the "fear of the Lord" is not likely to die an untimely, much less an ignominious death. The case of martyrs is excepted. I. EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF TRUE RELIGION. What is the principle, its rule, and its object. 1. Its principle is the love of God. This love to God must be supreme. And wherever love is present, it will be evidenced by a desire to comply with the wishes, and obey the commands of the person loved. 2. That the rule of true religion is the revealed will of God, as found in the Scriptures. 3. The object of true religion is the glory of God. Religion in the heart can never be satisfied with anything short of the Divine glory as the great object of life. II. WHILE DESTITUTE OF THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION, MEN ARE PERPETUALLY IN DANGER OF BEING OVERCOME BY THE IMPETUOSITY OF THEIR PASSIONS. 1. Principles directly opposite to those of true religion exist in the human heart. 2. Circumstances are continually arising which may call these unholy principles into active operation. 3. There is grave danger, in the absence of true religion, that excited passion will prevail. Impetuosity can be effectually restrained and subdued only by the power of religious principle. (*Essex Remembrancer.*) *Slow to wrath* :—Lord Macaulay has remarked that there are some unhappy men constitutionally prone to the darker passions, men to whom bitter words are as natural as snarling and biting to a ferocious dog; and he asserts that to come into the world with this wretched mental disease is a greater calamity than to be born blind or deaf. A man, he proceeds to say, who, having such a temper, keeps it in subjection, and constrains himself to behave habitually with justice and humanity towards those who are in his power, seems worthy of the highest admiration. "There have been instances of this self command; and they are among the most signal triumphs of philosophy and religion."

In eulogies of the Emperor Justinian this characteristic is not to be slighted, that he was "a master of the angry passions, which rage with such destructive violence in the breast of a despot." Of Mohammed we are told that he was naturally irritable, but had brought his temper under great control, so that even in the self-indulgent intercourse of domestic life he was kind and tolerant. "I served him from the time I was eight years old," said his servant Anas, "and he never scolded me for anything, though things were spoilt by me." Adam Smith traces from school and playground the progress and, so to speak, natural history of self-control, and shows on what grounds, and in what way, the child advances in self-command, studies to be more and more master of itself, and tries to exercise over its own feelings "a discipline which the practice of the longest life is very seldom sufficient to bring to complete perfection." (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 30. **A sound heart is the life of the flesh.**—*Heart and health*:—A “sound heart” is a heart that gives its supreme affection to the supremely good. All other hearts are more or less rotten. Such a heart, the text informs us, is the condition of physical health; it is the very “life of the flesh.” True, science can demonstrate this fact in many ways. Physical health requires attention to certain laws; these laws to be attended to must be understood; the understanding of these laws requires study; the proper study of them is only insured by a supreme sympathy of heart with the law-giver. Every man’s experience, as well as science, attests this fact. The influence of the emotions of the heart upon the state of the body even the dullest recognises. The passions of grief, disappointment, anger, jealousy and revenge, in proportion to their strength derange the bodily system. On the other hand, pleasurable emotions give buoyancy and vigour to the body. I. THAT A MAN’S BODILY HEALTH, WHERE THE ORGANISATION IS NORMALLY GOOD, IS VERY MUCH IN HIS OWN HANDS. Heaven has given us the means and the motives to cultivate happy conditions of the heart. “Keep thy heart with all diligence.” We infer from this fact—II. THAT CHRISTIANITY IS AN INDISPENSABLE AGENT IN REMOVING MAN’S PHYSICAL DISEASES. III. THAT MEDICAL SCIENCE WILL ALWAYS BE INEFFECTIVE UNTIL IT PRACTICALLY CONCERNS ITSELF WITH THE MORAL DISEASES AND CURES OF THE MIND. The medical practitioner should know—(1) That it is unscientific to ignore the fact that moral evil is the source of all physical evil, and—(2) That it is unscientific to ignore the fact that there is no agent to remove moral evil but Christianity. We infer—IV. THAT AS THE TRUE MORALITY OF THE WORLD ADVANCES, THE PHYSICAL HEALTH OF THE WORLD WILL IMPROVE. A drainage to carry away all the foul passions of the heart is the desideratum. The man who is most successful in his efforts, through Christianity, to promote a moral renovation of hearts is the greatest philanthropist. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) **But envy is the rottenness of the bones.**—*The nature and character of envy*:—All the laws of nature, as far as they comprehend the duties we owe to one another, may be reduced to this one great principle of universal benevolence, viz., that we lay it down as the fixed and fundamental rule of all our actions, to do all manner of good, and to abstain from all manner of evil. The motives to this conduct, besides the beauty and agreeableness of it, are these—1. That all mankind in reality consult their own interest best, when they contribute to the good of the whole. 2. That there is an intrinsic pleasure resulting from the practice of virtue. 3. That it recommends us to the love and esteem of all mankind. Anguish of heart, hatred, disesteem, and insecurity, are the natural rewards of iniquity, even in this world. This is nowhere more conspicuous than in the passion of vice and envy. A “sound heart,” is literally a heart of lenity or medicine. “Envy” is a leaven that sours and corrupts, sets all the humours upon the fret, and is the bane of all that is good and beautiful and desirable in life. I. THE NATURE AND ORIGIN OF ENVY; AND WHO ARE THEY THAT ARE MOST SUBJECT TO IT. Envy is a pain or uneasiness, arising from an apprehension of the prosperity and good fortune of others; not because we suffer for their welfare, but merely because their condition is bettered. There is a strong jealousy of pre-eminence and superiority implanted in our nature by Almighty God, for wise and noble purposes. When this principle takes root in a good mind, it is called emulation. But when this principle meets with an evil, corrupt disposition, it degenerates into envy, the most malignant and hateful passion in human nature, the worst weed of the worst soil. This passion affects us chiefly in relation to our equals. If we find we have equalled or exceeded those of like birth, the natural consequence is joy and complacency; but if we are exceeded by them, emulation or envy. The persons most subject to envy are the covetous; men of little or mean spirits; men of extraordinary endowments and abilities, who cannot bear a rival; proud men; and old men. II. THE SYMPTOMS BY WHICH ENVY MAY BE KNOWN. 1. When we find ourselves averse from doing a person good offices. 2. When we are pleased with the evil of others. 3. When we manifest a censorious disposition; silencing the good actions of others, or exposing the bad. 4. When we have a discontented, querulous, and quarrelsome disposition. III. THE ILL EFFECTS OF ENVY. 1. To the envious person it is “rottenness in his bones.” It wastes the body, and keeps the mind in a ferment. It kills our quiet and our virtue also. 2. It exposes a man to the just hatred and aversion of all mankind; and spreads its malignant influence wherever it comes. IV. THE BEST REMEDIES FOR THE CURE OF THIS PERNICIOUS PASSION. 1. Settle our opinion of things, and endeavour to take a right estimate of them, according to the law of God. 2. Make a right judgment of our own worth and abilities. 3. Reflect seriously upon the vanity and insignifi-

cancy of all worldly advantages. 4. Think of God, who takes pleasure in the happiness of all His creatures. (*J. Delany.*)

Ver 31. He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker.—*Oppression of the poor a reproach to their Maker:*—Every man acting his part in his social capacity is “a spectacle.” Society is an organisation of rational creatures, acting together for some good. Society is a commonwealth of human nature in close connection with God. And so every man becomes his “brother’s keeper.” **I. HUMAN NATURE, AS INVOLVING A CRIME—“OPPRESSING THE POOR.”** 1. By political injustice. When they have no proper organ for expressing their wants, or have a voice in the representation of their country, or a free agency in all the enactments of their country. 2. By social neglect. When the state, as a body, allows vast masses of accumulating distress and ignorance and misery to grow up around it. 3. By mental debasement. Real, true, solid Christian education consists in three things—in giving the mind great truths, in imparting to the mind great motives, in the bestowment of great principles. **II. THE CONSEQUENCE—THE MAKER IS REPROACHED.** The poor cannot but think ill of God, when society, which assumes to be His arrangement, presses so heavily upon them. (*R. Montgomery, M.A.*) *Godliness and humanity:*—Piety and philanthropy are essentially one. Wherever there is piety or godliness, there is philanthropy. Philanthropy is the offspring of all true religion. The text teaches—I. That INHUMANITY IS UNGODLINESS. There is a great deal of inhumanity in the world, the poor have to endure a great deal of “oppression.” Superior force is exerted to exact their labours for the most inadequate remuneration, and thus to “grind their faces.” All this oppression of the poor is a reproach of God; he who does it “reproacheth his Maker.” He reproaches his Maker—1. By disregarding that identity of nature with which our Maker has endowed all classes. 2. By disregarding those laws which our Maker has enjoined concerning the poor (*Lev. xxv. 35, 36; Deut. xv. 11*). **II. TRUE HUMANITY IS GODLINESS.** “He that honoureth Him, hath mercy on the poor.” He that honoureth God, by loving Him supremely, and serving Him, will have mercy on the poor. There is, it is true, a fickle, sentimental, natural mercifulness for the poor, which has no connection with godliness, but this is not true humanity. True humanity is that which sympathises with man, as the offspring of God, the victim of moral evil, the child of immortality, and which consecrates itself in the Spirit of Christ to ameliorate his woes and redeem his soul, and this is godliness in its practical development (*Isa. lviii. 6, 7*). (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 32. The wicked is driven away in his wickedness; but the righteous hath hope in his death.—*The wisdom of religion justified in the different ends of good and bad men:*—For the most part, the end of good men is full of peace and comfort, and good hopes of their future condition; but the end of bad men quite contrary, full of anguish and trouble, without peace or comfort, or hope of any good to befall them afterwards. If this be generally true, it is a mighty testimony on the behalf of piety and virtue. It is as good as a demonstration that the religious man is in the right. **I. THIS OBSERVATION IS GENERALLY TRUE.** It is enough to appeal to the common and daily experience of mankind (*Psa. xxxvii. 37*). When good men come to die, they have commonly a great calm and serenity in their minds, and are full of good hopes of God’s mercy and favour. But there are exceptions, both to the peace of the righteous and to the misery of the wicked, in death. Some good men are melancholy and dispirited. They may be naturally of a dark temper. The quiet death of a bad man may be explained by disease; or stupidity, through ignorance or gross sensuality; or the delusion of false principles. **II. WHENCE DOES THIS DIFFERENCE PROCEED?** It is founded in the true nature and reason of the things themselves; in the nature of religion and virtue, and of impiety and vice. 1. A religious and virtuous life is a real ground of peace and serenity of mind, of comfort and joy, under all the evils and calamities of life, and especially at the hour of death. 2. Impiety and wickedness is a real foundation of guilt and fear, of horror and despair, in the day of adversity and affliction, and more especially in the approaches of death. **II. IF THIS BE TRUE, IT IS A DEMONSTRATION ON THE SIDE OF RELIGION.** Upon three accounts. 1. Because the principles of religion, and the practice of them in a virtuous life, when they come to the last and utmost trial, do hold out, and are a firm and unshaken foundation of peace and comfort to us. 2. That they minister comfort to us in the most needful and desirable time. 3. That when men are commonly more serious and sober and impartial, and

when their declarations and words are thought to be of greater weight and credit, they give this testimony to religion and virtue, and against impiety and vice. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *Neither hope nor fear in death*:—Mr. Robert Owen once visited a gentleman who was a believer. In walking out they came to the gentleman's family grave. Owen, addressing him, said, "There is one advantage I have over Christians; I am not afraid to die; but if some of my business were settled, I should be perfectly willing to die at any moment." "Well," said his companion, "you say you have no fear of death—have you any hope in death?" After a solemn pause, he replied, "No!" "Then," replied the gentleman, "you are on the level with that brute; he has fed till he is satisfied, and stands in the shade, whisking off the flies, and has neither fear nor hope." *The different end of the righteous and the wicked*:—As to the death of a wicked man, here is—1. The manner of his passing out of the world. He is "driven away." 2. The state he passeth away into. He dies in a hopeless state. The righteous hath hope in his death. He has the grace of hope, and the well-founded expectation of better things than he ever had in this world. I. HOW, AND IN WHAT SENSE, ARE THE WICKED "DRIVEN AWAY IN THEIR WICKEDNESS AT DEATH." What is meant by their being "driven away"? Three things; they shall be taken away suddenly, violently, and irresistibly. Whence are they driven and whither? They are driven out of this world, where they have sinned, into the other world, where they must be judged. They are driven out of the society of the saints on earth, into the society of the lost in hell. They are driven out of time into eternity. They are driven out of their specious pretences to piety. They are driven away from all means of grace, quite out of all prospect of mercy. In what respects may they be said to be driven away in their wickedness? In respect of their being driven away in their sinful, unconverted state. They die sinning, acting wickedly against God, loaded with the guilt of their sins, and under the absolute power of their wickedness. II. THE HOPELESSNESS OF THE STATE OF UNRENEWED MEN AT THEIR DEATH. Consider four things. 1. Death cuts off their hopes and prospects of peace and pleasure in this life. 2. When death comes, they have no solid ground to hope for eternal happiness. 3. Death roots up their delusive hopes. 4. Death makes their state absolutely and for ever hopeless. Exhortation. (1) Take heed that you entertain no hopes of heaven but what are built on a solid foundation. Beware of hope built upon ground that was never cleared. Beware of that hope which looks bright in the dark, but loses all its lustre when it is set in the light of God's Word. Beware of that hope which stands without being supported by Scriptural evidences. (2) Hasten, O sinners, out of your wickedness, lest you die in your sin. (3) Be concerned for others, lest they be "driven away." III. THE STATE OF THE GODLY IN DEATH IS A HOPEFUL STATE. 1. They have a trusty good Friend before them in the other world. 2. They shall have a safe passage through to the other world. 3. They shall have a joyful entrance into another world. Objection: How comes it to pass that many of the godly, when dying, are full of fears, and have little hope? Answer: The fears are usually consequences of states of bodily health; but they may be due to flagging spiritual life. Improvement: How to prepare for death, so that we may die comfortably. (1) Let it be your constant care to keep a clean conscience. (2) Be always watchful, waiting for your change. (3) Employ yourselves much in weaning your hearts from the world. (4) Be diligent in gathering and laying up evidences of your title to heaven, for your support and comfort at the hour of death. (5) Despatch the work of your day and generation with speed and diligence. (*T. Boston, D.D.*) *Hope in death*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE RIGHTEOUS. The peculiar distinction between the righteous and the wicked lies in the heart, not in the understanding. II. THE TRUTH ASSERTED IN THE TEXT. The assertion is true, though there may be some apparent exceptions. There is nothing preceding, attending, or following death, which can destroy the foundation of the hope of the righteous. 1. A clear and just sense of their guilt and ill desert in the sight of God cannot destroy their hope in Christ. 2. There is nothing in the thoughts of leaving this world which can destroy their hope. 3. There is nothing in the prospect of having a more constant and realising sense of the Divine presence which can destroy their hope. 4. The prospect of being for ever united with perfectly holy creatures cannot destroy their hope. 5. Nor in the prospect of the holy employment of heaven. 6. Nor in seeing the displays of Divine justice upon the vessels of wrath after death. 7. Nor in seeing all the Divine purposes completely accomplished and unfolded. 8. Nor the prospect of existing for ever. Improvement of the subject: (1) If the

righteous have hope in their death, then they are essentially different from the wicked. (2) If only the righteous have hope, then multitudes will be fatally disappointed in their dying hour. (3) The death of the righteous may be peculiarly instructive and beneficial to the living. (*N. Emmons.*) *The hope of the righteous* :—The Old Testament deals much with the present life ; the New Testament much with the future. But the one does not teach a different thing from the other. Hope is the grand element in the religion of the righteous. A righteous man is a hopeful man. 1. There is the hope of Divine support in death itself. 2. There is the hope of complete deliverance from the evils incident to a physical existence. 3. There is the hope of introduction to unmingled and permanent good. (*James Foster, M.A.*) *Hope in death* :—1. An enemy all must meet. Death. 2. A privilege all must envy. Hope in death. 3. A dispensation all must approve of. The righteous hath hope in his death. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The death of the wicked* :—1. What he is driven from. A large measure of happiness, and from all sources of moral improvement. 2. Where he is driven to. Out of time into eternity, and from the presence of God. 3. What he carries with him. His wickedness ; the accumulated sins of a whole life, and a fixed character of evil. Learn—(1) What a dreadful view of life and death for the wicked. (2) The greatness of Christ's salvation from the greatness of the ruin from which it saves. (3) The value of the gospel hope from the happiness it secures in life and death. (*Ibid.*) *A great contrast* :—I. IN LIFE. 1. The difference is real, not imaginary. It is in the inward disposition, as well as in the outward conduct. 2. The difference is manifest. The ruling disposition, which is the life of character, and which is essentially different in both, makes itself known by its fruit. 3. The difference is increasing. These two characters continue to show forth their difference, and to go further from each other for ever. II. IN DEATH. "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness"—1. As by a storm. He has no foundation to stand upon. He has no hold upon anything real, lasting. 2. As a culprit is led away to his execution. There is no resignation on his part to a superior will than his own. He views the past with remorse, and anticipates the unknown future with gloom and fear. "But the righteous hath hope in his death." This is an indication of strength, not weakness. He hath hope, even in death, when all things that are seen vanish away. Some reasons for his hope : 1. The Bible, as he reads it and believes it ; the light which came from heaven drives away the gloom of the dark valley, and reveals the land beyond. 2. He is at peace with God. God is known by him as his Father, Friend, and Saviour. Love to God, in his heart, has put away fear. 3. He is confident that his Redeemer has absolute control over all things ; that He is Lord of the future. His hope, therefore, is such that, like Fuller, he is not afraid to plunge into eternity. The text is a proof of a belief in a future state of rewards and punishments in the time of Solomon. (*Homiletic Monthly.*) *The wise man's verdict* :—I. THE PUNISHMENT TO BE INFLICTED UPON A CERTAIN MAN. 1. The name of the offender. Wicked. 2. The nature of the offence. Malice. 3. The punishment ; in three degrees. As begun in this life. Increased at the time of death. Perfected at the day of judgment. II. THE CONCLUSION OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. What is a righteous man ? 2. What is it to have hope in death ? (*S. Hieron.*) *Hopeless and hopeful dying* :—I. THE HOPELESS. Whose ? "The wicked"—the unconverted. What ? 1. The condition in which he dies. "In his wickedness." He lived careless and indifferent, encased in false hope ; or hardened and scoffing, fighting against God. So he dies. Driven away not from, but in his wickedness. Death makes no change of character. "Unjust still." 2. The compulsion under which he dies. "Driven away." Ejected from this life's engagements, enjoyments, and means of improvement. Torn away from possessions, pursuits, pleasures, and prospects here. "This night—thy soul—then whose," &c. ? Death takes no bribes. Wishes and protests unheeded. "Driven . . . chased out," &c. (*Job xviii. 18.*) II. THE HOPEFUL. Whose, "the righteous" in moral position, principle, practice. What ?—Hopeful of—1. The Divine support in it. (1) Needed, because of body's pains, affections' ties, conscience failures. (2) Promised. "As day . . . strength." "When thou passest," &c. (3) Realised. "Yea, though I walk," &c. 2. Decisive victory over it. Prospective—Grave robbed. "Resurrection of life." 3. Heavenly glory after it. (1) Angelic convoy. "Lazarus carried by angels." (2) Immediate entrance. "Absent from body . . . at home," &c. (3) Then reunion of soul and body in heavenly glory. All must die. Which—yours ? A sheriff's arrest, or a Saviour's arrival ? (*John xiv. 3.*)

(*Homiletic Review.*) *The objects, grounds, and evidences of the hope of the righteous*:—Men will leave the world according to their conduct in it. I. THE OBJECTS. 1. His hope of support in death; of the immortality of the soul; of the resurrection of the body; and of perfect happiness in heaven. II. THE GROUNDS AND EVIDENCES. The foundation of the hope is the free mercy of God, which can be communicated only through Jesus Christ. Evidence of this hope is that the righteous man finds, upon a thorough trial, that the characters which God has declared essentially necessary to salvation do belong to him. III. THE VARIOUS LIMITATIONS AND DEGREES OF A GOOD HOPE IN DEATH. A good hope is always supported by evidence, and according to the degree of evidence is the degree of hope. Different believers, at different times, have different degrees of evidence. Much depends on weakness of body, mind, or heart. But every righteous man has a substantial reason to hope, whether he clearly sees it or not. Good men do, in fact, usually enjoy a comfortable hope. (*S. Davies, A.M.*) *The two departures*:—I. THE DOOM OF THE WICKED. As smoke is driven by the wind, so will the wicked perish in the day of wrath. We are not able to form a right conception of what it is to be and abide in wickedness. Because it is so near us, we do not know it. II. THE HOPE OF THE JUST. Hope, always lovely, is then sweetest when it beams from heaven through the gloom that gathers round the grave. (*W. Arnot.*) *Hope beyond the grave*:—I. THE CHARACTER OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. He is one who has been convinced of his unrighteousness. 2. One who is made the partaker of righteous principles. 3. One who is righteous and holy in his life. II. THE HOPE OF THE RIGHTEOUS. This hope has for its object future spiritual and eternal blessings. It is called a "good hope through grace," because we are indebted for it to the grace and favour of God; and because it is wrought in us by the gracious influences of the Divine Spirit. Eternal life includes the immortality of the soul—the everlasting, conscious existence of the rational mind; the resurrection of the body; and the enjoyment of eternal happiness. (*J. Entwistle.*) *An awful death*:—Three things implied in the death of the wicked are here set forth. I. A VERY SOLEMN CHANGE. He is "driven away." 1. Whence? (1) From all existing enjoyments; the beauties of nature, the circles of friendship, the pleasures of literature, &c. (2) From all secular engagements. The farmer, lawyer, statesman, &c. (3) From all means of moral improvement: churches, Bibles, teachers. 2. Whither? To the grave as to his body, to eternal retribution as to his soul. The death of the wicked implies—II. A GREAT PERSONAL RELUCTANCE. He does not go away, he is not drawn away; he is "driven away." 1. All the sympathies of his nature are centred in this life. They are all twined around earthly objects, as the ivy around the old castle. They are all more deeply rooted in the earth than the oak of centuries. He is in the world, and the world is everything to him. 2. The future world is terribly repulsive to him. Not a ray of hope breaks through his tremendous gloom; it is one dense mass of starless thunder-cloud. This being the case, with what tenacity he clings to life! He will not go, he cannot go, he must be "driven." His death is not like the gentle fall of the ripened fruit from its old branch in autumn, but like the oak, uprooted, and dashed into the air, by a mighty whirlwind. It is not like a vessel gliding to its chosen haven, but like a bark driven by a furious wind to a shore it shrinks from with horror. "Driven away!" The death of the wicked, as here indicated, implies—III. A TERRIBLE RETENTION OF CHARACTER. He is "driven away" in his wickedness. He carries his wickedness with him. This is the worst part of the whole. He carries his vile thoughts, his corrupt passions, his sinful purposes, his depraved habits, his accumulated guilt, with him. He will leave everything else behind but this—this adheres to him. He can no more flee from it than from himself. This wickedness will be the millstone to press him downward into deeper, darker depths for ever; the poison that will rankle in the veins for ever; the fuel that will feed the flames for ever. O sinner, lay down this wickedness at the foot of the atoning and soul-renovating Cross! (*Homilist.*) *The righteous and wicked in their death*:—The text—I. DESCRIBES THE DREADFUL TERMINATION OF A COURSE OF IRRELIGION AND OF SIN. 1. Who are the wicked? The term is generally restricted to "sinners of the baser sort"—those whose lives are grossly sensual. But Scripture regards it as the appropriate designation of all who are in an unregenerate state; all who are destitute of the fear and love of God, who habitually transgress His law, and practically disregard His gospel. 2. What will be the issue of their career? Note the manner in which he dies. Reluctantly. Unavoidably. The condition in which he dies. In his sins, with all his guilt on his head, and all his depravity in his heart. II. DESCRIBES THE BLESSINGS OF THOSE

WHO DIE IN THE LORD. 1. Who is righteous? Not simply believers, but regenerated and converted sinners. 2. What is the privilege of the righteous? He has hope in his death. That hope is glorious in its object. It is sure in its foundation. It is felicitating in its influence. (*J. Corney.*) *Driven away out of the world:*—He cleaves so closely to the world that he cannot find in his heart to leave it, but is driven away out of it; his soul is required, is forced from him. And sin cleaves so closely to him that it is inseparable; it goes with him into another world; he is driven away “in his wickedness,” dies in his sins, under the guilt and power of them, unjustified, unsanctified. His wickedness is the storm in which he is hurried away, as chaff before the wind, chased out of the world. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The hope of the righteous:*—I. THERE IS THE HOPE OF DIVINE SUPPORT IN DEATH ITSELF. “As thy day,” &c. II. THERE IS THE HOPE OF COMPLETE DELIVERANCE FROM THE EVILS INCIDENT TO A PHYSICAL EXISTENCE. In this life the soul is imprisoned. Its heavenly and spiritual tendency is retarded by its companion of dust. Spiritual life has its thought, feeling, and expression limited and baffled by physical boundaries. A prolonged mental exercise is followed by fatigue and reaction, so is it with spiritual exercises and pleasures. Death sets the righteous free from all these evils. It takes down the decaying, exposed, and inferior tabernacle, that the guest within may come forth to light and liberty. It introduces the soul to perfection of being, activity, and enjoyment. III. THERE IS THE HOPE OF INTRODUCTION TO UNMINGLED AND PERMANENT GOOD. (*Jas. Foster, M.A.*) *Hope in death:*—“My breath is short, and I have little hopes, since my late relapse, of much further usefulness. A few exertions, like the last struggles of a dying man, or glimmering flashes of a taper just burning out, is all that can be expected from me. But, blessed be God! the taper will be lighted up again in heaven.” (*G. Whitefield.*) *Ready for death:*—The Christian, at his death, should not be like the child, who is forced by the rod to quit his play, but like one who is wearied of it, and willing to go to bed. Neither ought he to be like the mariner, whose vessel is drifted by the violence of the tempest from the shore, tossed to and fro upon the ocean, and at last suffers wreck and destruction; but like one who is ready for the voyage, and, the moment the wind is favourable, cheerfully weighs anchor, and, full of hope and joy, launches forth into the deep. (*R. Scriver.*) *A Christian's death:*—I have read of a painter who was painting “Death”; and he painted Death as we generally see Death painted—a skeleton and a scythe! That is a horrid way of painting it! A good man coming by said, “That is not the way to paint Death: you should paint him a beautiful bright angel with a golden key in his hand to open the door and let us into heaven.” That is Death to the Christian. When Bishop Beveridge was dying, the good man said, “If this be dying, I wish I could die for ever.” You remember in the “Pilgrim's Progress,” when Christian and his friend Hopeful come to die, it is represented as if they were crossing a river. Christian gets somewhat afraid. “Cheer up, brother!” says Hopeful, “I feel the bottom, and it is quite firm and sound. Cheer up, brother!” Then after a little while Christian said, “I see Him again; and He tells me, ‘When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee.’” Then he also found ground to stand upon, and the rest of the water was so shallow that he could walk in it. And after a few minutes more they both found themselves at the gate of the Celestial City! (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *The death of the wicked and of the righteous:*—I. THE WICKED IS DRIVEN AWAY IN HIS WICKEDNESS. 1. Wicked men are taken out of the world against their will, and by a power which they cannot withstand. 2. They die with their souls unrenewed and their characters unchanged. 3. They go to receive the punishment of their sins. II. THE RIGHTEOUS HATH HOPE IN HIS DEATH. Though they may not be able to express themselves in the language of assurance and exultation, yet will there be a believing dependence on the mercy and faithfulness of God. And even though all hope should seem gone, and the manifestations of the Divine presence be withdrawn, yet even then would the declaration of our text be true. For as, on the one hand, the real certainty of our salvation is not augmented or diminished by our present feelings, however the evidence of it to ourselves may be affected, so, on the other, the position—the righteous have hope in their death—is not to be limited merely to express the feelings which the righteous may experience at death, but expresses also the security of their state. The foundation, as well as the objects of hope, remain firm and immutable. It is in the weakness of nature that the supporting energy of grace is most apparent, and the power of the Saviour is most conspicuously displayed. And how often hath it happened that, in the midst of utmost exhaustion, when all further utterance had ceased, the soul has

seemed to catch a glimpse of future glory, and, reanimating the almost lifeless body, hath proclaimed its assurance of the Divine love and mercy and protection, and ascended to heaven in a song of holy triumph! (*Alex. Fisher.*) *A tranquil hope* :—An assured hope is not like a mountain torrent, but like a stream flowing from a living fountain, and often so quietly that it is scarcely visible but for the verdure of its banks. (*W. Spring.*)

Ver. 34. *Righteousness exalteth a nation.*—*The advantages of religion to societies* :—There cannot be a greater prejudice raised against anything than to have it represented as inconvenient and hurtful to our temporal interests. On this account religion has suffered in the opinion of many as being opposed to our present welfare, and likely to rob men of the greatest advantages and conveniences of life. He who would commend religion must reconcile it with the happiness of mankind. The text declares religion and virtue to be advantageous to the public prosperity of a nation. Satisfy men's reason on this point. I. *GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF THIS TRUTH.* 1. From the justice of the Divine Providence. Public bodies, or communities of men, can only be rewarded and punished in this world. St. Austin says that the mighty success and long prosperity of the Romans was a reward given them by God for their eminent justice and temperance, and other virtues. But the general and crying sins of a nation cannot hope to escape public judgments. Public judgments are the banks and shores upon which God breaks the insolency of sinners, and stays their proud waves. The experience of all ages hath made this good. 2. From the natural tendency of the thing. Religion and virtue, in their own nature, conduce to the public interest. Religion is the greatest obligation upon conscience to all civil offices and moral duties. Chastity, temperance, and industry do, in their own nature, tend to health and plenty. Truth and fidelity do create mutual love and goodwill. And so almost every vice has some temporal inconvenience annexed to it, and naturally following it. Religion and virtue naturally tend to good order and more easy government of human society, because they have a good influence both upon magistrates and subjects. Religion makes the people more obedient to government and more peaceable one towards another. II. *VINDICATE THIS TRUTH.* 1. From the assertion that government may subsist well enough without the belief of a God, and a state of rewards and punishments after this life. 2. From the assertion that virtue and vice are arbitrary things. Inference from this discourse. (1) If this discourse be true, then those who are in places of power and authority are peculiarly concerned to maintain the honour of religion. (2) It concerns every one to live in the practice of it. (*J. Tillotson, D.D.*) *Politics and morals* :—Whatever is morally wrong cannot be politically right. (*E. Burke.*) *Religion promotes civil welfare* :—As there is nothing in religion to counteract the design of a wise system of civil polity, so there is nothing in a wise system of civil government to counteract the design of the Christian religion. The exaltation of the nation is the end of civil polity. Righteousness is the end of religion, or rather is religion itself. (*J. Saurin.*) *The harmony of religion and civil polity* :—I. *STATE THE QUESTION CLEARLY.* By religion, as exalting a nation, is not meant either the religion of a cruel man, a superstitious person, or an enthusiast. Religion and righteousness must be taken in the true sense of the terms. It is not affirmed that the true religion is so necessary in all its doctrines, and in all the extent of its precepts, that there are no instances of the flourishing of societies which have not been wholly regulated by it. We only affirm that the most sure method that a nation can take to support and exalt itself, is to follow the laws of righteousness and the spirit of religion. It is not affirmed that in every particular case religion is more successful in procuring some temporal advantages than violation of it. We only affirm generally, that the more a society practises virtue, the more prosperity will it enjoy. By "exaltation" is not meant that sort of elevation to which worldly heroes aspire. If we understand by "exalting a nation," whatever governs with gentleness, negotiates with success, attacks with courage, defends with resolution, and constitutes the happiness of a people, then a nation is only exalted by righteousness. It is not affirmed that the prosperity of such a nation would be so perfect as to exclude all untoward circumstances. An argument against us is taken from the abuses which religion has caused in society. This is removed by taking away false ideas of religion. Another objection is taken from the case of some idolatrous nations, that have arrived at a great height of worldly glory. A third from some particular instance in which vice has proved of more advantage

to a state than virtue. A fourth from extravagant notions of glory. A fifth from the evils which the most virtuous societies suffer. II. SHOW THE GROUND OF THE MAXIM OF THE WISE MAN. Open six sources of reflections. 1. The idea of society in general. 2. The constitution of each government in particular. 3. The nature of arts and sciences. 4. The conduct of Providence. 5. The promises of God Himself. 6. The history of all ages. (*J. Saurin.*) *Rectitude uplifting*:—Righteousness exalteth a nation. I. IN MATERIAL WEALTH. Truth, honesty, integrity in a people are the best guarantees of commercial advancement. The more credit a nation has, the more business it can do; and the more business, if rightly conducted, the more will be the accumulation of wealth. It exalts—II. IN SOCIAL ENJOYMENT. According as the principles of veracity, uprightness, and honour reign in society, will be the freeness, the heartiness, and the enjoyment of social intercourse. III. IN MORAL POWER. The true majesty of a kingdom lies in its moral virtue. The state whose heart beats loyally to the eternal principles of rectitude gains an influence upon earth mightier than the mightiest armies or battalions can impart. (*Homilist.*) *National exaltation*:—I. “**RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION.**” These words at once reveal to us the great secret in all national improvement, national happiness, national peace and prosperity. Let us not suppose that legislative enactments, criminal laws, courts of justice, and houses of correction, ever can succeed in uprooting vice and implanting virtue, in securing peace and protecting property, in removing sin and exalting the nation. These truly should not be left undone; but never for one moment imagine that in themselves they can remedy the evil. These never can change the heart of man. Think not that a nation’s true, substantial, and lasting greatness consists in power, wealth, noble edifices, princely palaces, extensive cities, warlike achievements, naval victories, commercial enterprise, colonial possessions. Be not dazzled with the glitter and glare of this mere external appearance of greatness. II. “**BUT SIN IS A REPROACH TO ANY PEOPLE.**” This is a striking contrast, a painful transition. From gazing with rapture upon the exaltation of righteousness, we are now to move on to behold with sorrow the degradation of sin. Read the histories of the ancients; and what was the blot which marred and defaced even the most enlightened nations of old? Sin, idolatry, ungodliness, spiritual ignorance: they were “without God in the world.” What was it which caused the Almighty to send famines, pestilences, captivities, and finally destruction, upon His own peculiar people, even the children of Israel? Sin. They rebelled against the words of the Lord, and lightly esteemed the counsel of the Most High. But, alas! we do not require to search the records of the ancients, traverse the wide ocean, and wander to distant shores, to test the truth of this Scriptural declaration. We have ocular demonstrations of it amongst our own people, in our villages and towns. For, what is the blemish which is so visible upon all ranks and classes? Sin. What is it which blackens, darkens, and deadens the noblest mansions, alike with the meanest habitations, spreading misery, ignominy, and wretchedness amongst and around us. (*G. J. Morehead, M.A.*) *Of the importance of righteousness to civil liberty and national prosperity*:—To many the doctrine of this text appears paradoxical; by some it is regarded as absurd. The idea is that industry and economy conduct states to wealth and independence: while fleets and armies render that wealth and independence secure and permanent. But good morals are the props and bulwarks of society. “No man liveth unto himself.” Strong and intimate ties link us to those around us. Each one has a relative function to fulfil, and a particular portion to contribute to the general welfare. Kindness, protection, assistance, countenance, must be given and received. In some points or other, we stand exposed to the good or ill-will of every member of our community or nation. Besides the intimate connection between good morals and the glory and happiness of society, it may be maintained that righteousness, and righteousness only, secures to civil liberty and national prosperity their establishment and permanence. It cannot be that the love of liberty, a sentiment in the highest degree exalted and refined, can pervade the bosom which is debased by immoralities. Vices impair the understanding which distinguishes the solid objects of the public weal. The same train of immoralities that perverts the sentiments also debilitates the judgment, and enfeebles its range. (*W. Thorburn.*) *The glory of a nation*:—Sin extends its influence over all the relations of life. To the general corruption of mankind, the miseries of individuals, of families, and of nations are owing. The chief good, the true interest of each of these, is to be found only in the victory of truth over error, of holiness over sin. I. AN EXPLANA-

TION OF THE WORDS "RIGHTEOUSNESS," AND "EXALTATION." Righteousness signifies, according to its primitive idea, full weight or measure. It is such a conformity to some law which men are bound to obey as answers all its demands. Exaltation means advancement or promotion to a state of dignity and honour, usefulness and happiness. The exaltation of a nation consists in its intellectual, moral, political, social, and physical excellence. II. ILLUSTRATE THE MANNER IN WHICH REVEALED RELIGION EXALTETH A NATION. 1. Righteousness exalteth the intellectual state of a nation. Righteousness encourages the cultivation of the mind, and enlightens the reason. 2. Righteousness exalteth the moral state of a nation. It unfolds the foundation of genuine morality, and affords the ability of conforming to its precepts. Without the righteousness of faith there is no obedience to the Divine law, such as it requires. Sinners, as such, are immoral in a strict sense, because unrighteous, *i.e.*, disobedient to God's law. Righteousness, by drawing forth into proper exercise the faculties, and forming correct habits, exalts the morals of individuals and nations. 3. Righteousness exalteth the political state of a nation. It adds its sanctions to the authority of government. It teaches and enforces subordination. It establishes parental authority and family discipline, without which civil communities cannot flourish. 4. Righteousness exalts the social state of a nation. By this is meant their manners. It influences a people to combine gravity with cheerfulness. 5. Righteousness exalteth a nation by promoting its physical state. By this is meant its natural resources, such as its population, wealth, and means of defence. III. EXAMINE THE PROOFS WHICH HISTORY AFFORDS OF THIS TRUTH. So far as the principles of righteousness are known among a nation, so far that nation is exalted. Every system of religion will influence its followers according to the interest which it excites in their feelings. Illustrate especially from the history of the Jewish nation. Learn (1) The importance of the Church of Jesus Christ, in this world. The Church of God is the sheet-anchor of the world. (2) The importance of a religious magistracy. (*J. B. Romeyn, B.D.*) *The blessings of religion to a nation* :—Righteousness signifies justice and honest dealing. It may be enlarged to include mercy and charity. A more comprehensive meaning is universal obedience to the laws of God. I. TRUE RELIGION AND PIETY EXALTETH A NATION. Religion is the mother of justice, moderation, mercy, and all other virtues. 1. This it does in itself; being in its own nature a truly great, noble, and honourable thing. A nation's power without piety is but an ability to do mischief. 2. By virtue of its own natural fruits and consequences, it promotes industry. It disposes men to mind the public good and honour of the nation. II. RELIGION PROCURES THE BLESSING OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE UPON THE COUNTRY. True religion binds men together, and so makes them mighty and formidable, by removing the causes of division, and by making them feel the happy effects of peace and quietness. True religion increases a people into a multitude by securing chaste marriages, and by inviting other people to resort to it. (*Bishop Patrick Symon.*) *The benefits of righteousness* :—I. THE BENEFICIAL POWER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Righteousness being regarded as the produce of Christianity. If the precepts of the Bible were acted out by the members of the community, there would be banished all that tends to produce discord to its security. The influence of religion is of supreme value on the duties, and also on the trials of life. II. AN OBJECTION DRAWN FROM THE DISCORD TO WHICH CHRISTIANITY HAS GIVEN RISE. It must be admitted that Christianity has, all along, been the occasion of much disquietude and unhappiness. But the fault lies, not with Christianity, but with man, who perverts God's blessings. Admitting the fact, we must strike a balance between the produced wretchedness and the produced happiness. (*H. Melvill.*) *Our national sins and penalties* :—When we speak of a national sin we cannot mean anything but that either the great bulk of the nation, or those who have a right to act on behalf of the nation, have joined in the same wrong-doing. It is often necessary to consider sins as the result of men's joint action, whether that unity of action be conscious or unconscious. A new character attaches to a man's wrong-doing, if he have joined others in doing it. It is sometimes thought that what is unjustifiable in the individual, is justified when it is united action. But God has surely attached evil issues to evil deeds, for the mass as certainly as for the individual. Illustrate by the national sin which now leavens our whole trade and commerce. Can it be denied that the want of uprightness which meets us at every turn has risen to the proportion of a national sin? Healthy business unquestionably gains enormously by mutual trust, and if all trust were abolished, commerce would move in fetters. And yet trust is becoming more difficult every day. The

punishment appointed for such a sin is that the lesson of guile will be learnt, and then practised on yourself in turn. Another prevalent sin is, a kind of arrogance, which sometimes goes so far as to end in a total forgetfulness that others have rights as well as we. All the world over, the Englishman is known as the sternest and most resolute upholder of justice. But this, strange to say, has one almost insurmountable element—the Englishman is ever demanding, tacitly or openly, an acknowledgment of his own superiority. He does not readily allow that others have rights as well as he, rights to be respected as much as his. Rights may be confessed in the abstract, but a practical assertion of the rights of others is repugnant to an Englishman. He inclines to exalt, not righteousness, but strength. And yet what is more glorious than a name of absolute uprightness? What nobler record for any nation than that of never having put anything whatever, not even her own self, above the call of what is right. It is not the first time that the choice for strength rather than righteousness has been made. Illustrate from the later Republic of Rome, and from the course Spain took with her colonial empire. (*Archbishop Temple.*)

Christian politics :—I. SOME WRONG ESTIMATES OF NATIONAL GREATNESS. 1. Some say a character for shrewdness. 2. The estimate of a diplomatist would be erroneous. 3. So would that of the social economist. 4. And the warrior. 5. The mere place-hunter. 6. And even the historian. II. THE PROPER ESTIMATE OF NATIONAL GREATNESS. 1. Righteousness supposes individual integrity. The character of a people is determined by its units. Individual integrity means an adherence to truth at all hazards. 2. Righteousness implies a respect for human nature. A recognition of the value of life and the soul. 3. Righteousness farther involves the disposition that concedes to our fellow-men the liberties we enjoy. A policy of monopoly is a policy of unrighteousness. 4. Righteousness requires that political justice be rendered to other nations. 5. It necessitates compliance with the law of progress. And—6. That we regulate our political action by our duty to God. All political convictions should contain the elements of godliness—piety and patriotism should be joined in holy wedlock. (*W. J. Acomb.*)

Ministers of religion to aid national righteousness :—Christian men sustain a twofold relation—a relation to the gospel and a relation to the state. Their duty with respect to crime is like the duty of a good gardener with respect to weeds. He will try to crowd out the weeds by planting an abundance of good seed; but when the weeds succeed in getting root and growing he will go about with his hoe and dig them out. Now, there are some well-meaning people who believe that Christian ministers, to say nothing of Christian laymen, ought to use the first method in combating crime, but not the second. They hold that ministers ought to preach and preach, whether they have any listeners to profit by their preaching or not, but that they ought never to exhort voters as to their duty in electing righteous lawmakers, or prod lazy or corrupt legislators; or rebuke inefficient police officials. They would have us believe that ministers of the gospel ought to merely plant the seeds of righteousness, and if the weeds of sin come to poison the good seed utterly, well, never mind, it is not the business of the ministers to try to root them out. There are good people who hold that view; but it is untenable. These good people mean well, but they are misguided. (*G. F. Greene.*) *Christian institutions useful to the nation* :—Christian institutions, such as the family and the Sabbath, tend to prolong life and increase the population. Many heathen tribes, lacking these, have become all but extinct; and, other things being equal, civilised nations multiply in proportion as Christ is practically acknowledged as their Head and Lord, and as Christian institutions are embraced. In 1851 the population of France was about double that of England and Wales; in the ten years from 1851 to 1861 the increase of population in England and Wales was more than double that in France; so that the proportionate increase per cent. is fully four to one in favour of the country where the Sabbath is recognised, and the domestic virtues are upheld. (*Wesleyan S. S. Magazine.*) *Virtue essential to national prosperity* :—Trade is a fluctuating thing; it passed from Tyre to Alexandria, from Alexandria to Venice, from Venice to Antwerp, from Antwerp to Amsterdam and London, the English rivalling the Dutch, as the French are now rivalling both. All nations almost are wisely applying themselves to trade, and it behoves those who are in possession of it, to take the greatest care that they do not lose it. It is a plant of tender growth, it requires sun and soil and fine seasons to make it thrive and flourish. It will not grow like the palm-tree, which, with the more weight and pressure, rises the more. Liberty is a friend to that, as that is a friend to liberty. But the greatest enemy to both, is licentiousness which tramples

upon all law and lawful authority, encourages riots and tumults, promotes drunkenness and debauchery, sticks at nothing to support its extravagance, practises every art of illicit gain, ruins credit, ruins trade, and will in the end ruin liberty itself. Neither kingdoms nor commonwealths, neither public companies nor private persons, can long carry on a beneficial and flourishing trade without virtue, and what virtue teacheth—sobriety, industry, frugality, modesty, honesty, punctuality, humanity, charity, the love of our country, and the fear of God. (*Bishop Newton.*) **Sin is a reproach to any people.**—*The evil effects of sin :—*The sentence may be read, "Sin is the poverty, depression, or sinking of any people." 1. It is the nature of sin to lessen and diminish a people. The most populous nations have been reduced to a handful by the prevalence of vice—Israel, Greeks, Romans. 2. It is the nature of sin to sink and depress the spirits of a people. A people confirmed in the habits of vice, have no heart to labour, to think, to form, or to execute any virtuous designs. Their genius withers, their exertions languish, their hopes, their honours, their virtues perish. 3. It is the nature of sin to destroy the wealth of a nation, and subject them to all the evils and reproaches of poverty. Some species of fraud may, for a time, advance a person or people in wealth and grandeur. Yet vice, according to its natural course, will eventually involve them in poverty and shame. 4. It is the nature of sin to deprive a people of the blessings of freedom, and involve them in the misery and meanness of slavery. Vice has the same effect upon the body politic that sickness has upon the natural body. Vice destroyed the liberties of Greece. Vice subverted the freedom of Rome. 5. It is the nature of vice to provoke the displeasure of God, and draw down His judgments, which complete the ruin of a people. (*D. Emmons, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XV.

VERS. 1-3. A soft answer turneth away wrath.—Submissive answers :—There are three parties whose wrath it may concern us to appease by mild and submissive language. I. **THE WRATH OF GOD.** He is provoked every day by the crying sins of an ungodly world, and would quickly break out as a devouring fire upon it, but that there are, and always have been in it, humble and holy men, who have been much given to confession and prayer. Illustrate by Moses, the prophets, and Daniel as intercessors in their day. See also submissive response of Nineveh to the warning of Jonah. II. **THE FURY OF A TROUBLED CONSCIENCE.** It is allayed by a soft answer, i.e., by obviating the terrors of God's threatenings with a just display of His infinite mercies. III. **THE INFLUENCE WHICH AN OFFENDED SERVANT'S CARRIAGE HATH UPON HIS OFFENDED MASTER.** If the offender, when reproved, returns a mild and yielding answer to his master, he commonly assuages his wrath and prevents the further progress of it. But if he gives saucy and contemptuous language upon such occasions, he exasperates his master's passion, and renders his own offence much more provoking than it was before. Two things are advised in this text—1. That an answer be made. 2. That it be ingenuous. It is not wise to stand mute, nor to delay answer, but the answer should be soft and temperate. Illustrate case of David and Nabal (1 Sam. xxv.). Ingenuous submission does not always succeed, because it does not always meet with ingenuous and placable minds on the other side. Sometimes, too, the offender is a mere reprobate, who does but flatter with his tongue. Some commentators interpret the text as a common maxim of peaceable conversation, teaching us to avoid all unnecessary contentions which spring from pride, ambition, emulation, and a remorse, wrathful and splenetic nature. He that is desirous to live at peace in the world must consider that both himself and other men have many infirmities; and that, in matter of right and wrong, other people will take the liberty to differ from his opinion, and will sometimes contradict and thwart him, even when he has the clearest truth and reason on his side. He must expect to meet with pride, self-love, and confidence in others; and he must not imagine that his own conversation is always free from the influence of such irregular passions. Therefore he must resolve to bear reproof and opposition with patience, because it is quite possible that he may deserve it; and if he does not, those who converse with him may think so. He who would

save himself and others much trouble and contention must not be too apt to censure and find fault with things when they are tolerably well. The practice of the text is not every man's talent. The weakness of our minds, or the warmth of our temper, commonly making it a difficult task. David was some years in learning the due observance of this lesson. Grievous words are inconsistent with good policy, and contrary to true religion. The Lord Jesus never spake unadvisedly with His lips, so He calls upon all His disciples to learn of Him this lesson of meekness. It is almost always of advantage to give soft answers. (*W. Reading, M.A.*)

*A meek and gentle manner of discourse is the most effectual means to soften the fiercest disposition, and subdue the most outrageous passion:—*I. ILLUSTRATE THE TRUTH OF THIS PROPOSITION BY SOME EXAMPLES FROM SCRIPTURE HISTORY (Gen. xiii. 8, 9, xxxii. 3-5; Judg. viii. 2, 3; 1 Sam. i. 15, 16, xxvi. 18-20). II. ENDEAVOUR TO ACCOUNT FOR THE PREVALENCE OF MILDNESS OVER WRATH FROM THE CONSIDERATION OF THE PASSIONS CONCERNED. Obstinacy of temper is increased by opposition, as much as it is abated by yielding. Thus says the son of Sirach, "He that striveth with a man of tongue heaps wood upon his fire." Though we have truth on our side, though we are able to support that truth by the most irrefragable arguments, yet if these are pressed with scorn and bitterness their reasonableness will not so much enforce as their virulence disparage them. To conclude: 1. Acquiescence and submission in our language and manner, as far as truth and generosity of spirit will allow, is an argument of our prudence; it is as profitable to society as it is acceptable to God, as it captivates the hearts of men, and as it consequently contributes to our own honour, quiet, and safety. 2. It is an argument of the politeness of our education, for none but spirits unreclaimed by civil converse vent themselves in boisterous language. 3. But it is not only an argument of prudence and politeness, but of magnanimity; the greatest man is never more triumphant than when he overcomes insolence with humility, and wrath with meekness. (*H. Usher, D.D.*)

*A soft answer (to children):—*A kind, gentle, patient, peaceful answer to an angry, loud, rude word, turns away wrath, sends it off so that it passes by you like an arrow glancing off a shield. If anybody says a rude or angry word to you, and you answer in the same way, you are adding fire to fire, you are helping to make a bad thing worse, you are multiplying one evil by two—the very worst part of arithmetic. But "a soft answer" is like water to fire; it helps to put the flame out. This is what the firemen do. If you give a soft answer to angry words you will be one of God's firemen, you will have helped to put out a fire that might have done great harm. It is very hard to speak softly to people sometimes, very hard indeed. But it is worth while learning to do it; and though hard, like most other good things, it is not too hard. It can be managed. How? First of all by making up your mind to do it, and then setting to work to practise the art of soft speaking, and asking God to help you and give you strength. It needs no courage to be angry and loud and rude. Bullies and cowards have always plenty of angry words at their command. Brave boys do not brag or threaten, and the bravest thing of all is patience and self-mastery. Illustrate from the patience of the Lord Jesus in the judgment hall and on the Cross. The highest courage is the Cross of Christ. You will prove yourselves truly brave, not when you strike back, but when rising above the temptation you master yourselves and those around you. (*J. M. Gibbon.*)

*Soft answers:—*1. "A soft answer" is a Christian answer. It exemplifies the Spirit of Christ. "When reviled He reviled not again." 2. "A soft answer" is a fitting answer. It is a sensible thing to do. As a matter of mere policy it is the wisest course a man can take. 3. "A soft answer" is the most effective answer, the only effective answer in the way of good results. Gentle words, a forgiving spirit will do what hard blows and angry epithets and a belligerent attitude never did and never can accomplish. 4. "A soft answer" is the evidence, the test, of a man's moral character. (*J. M. Sherwood, D.D.*)

*The utility of gentle forces:—*Men who manage men must be self-controlled. If liable to outbursts of passion they cannot deal with the anger of other men. Men who are masters of themselves may become masters of mankind. And as in nature the greatest and most beneficial forces are silent, so in society the mightiest men are the gentle-spirited. We do not hear the grass grow; the light comes stealing into our room, we do not hear its footfall. It is the angry voices of nature which tell of disaster, as in the earthquake, the tempest, the thunderstorm, and the flood. It is not the rain sweeping down the hillside, carrying soil and crop before it, but the gentle shower that fructifies the land. And so the meek-hearted "shall inherit the earth" as uncrowned kings. The peacemakers are the true sons of God, full of independence

and manly energy, yet speaking softly like a clear stream rippling through the green, flowering meadows. Speak gently, yet truly, and thus win the world for God. (*W. Unsworth.*) *Mild replies to angry speeches*:—Understand by “a soft answer,” not a reply marked by intellectual feebleness, but one inspired by the very spirit of modesty and graciousness. Such an answer cannot be returned as a mere art, because the wrath to which it replies excites natural surprise and indignation, and may be supposed to necessitate a communication in its own key and temper. The soft answer is unique by contrast. It is so unexpected, so unlike the surrounding circumstances, so much more than what is generally regarded as human, that the man to whom it is addressed is astounded as if by a miracle. Only he can give a soft answer who has a soft heart—that is to say, the answer is not a mere art or trick of the vocal organs, it is the direct and blessed creation of God. A soft answer may appear to be spiritless, but in reality it expresses a greater energy than is possible to ill-regulated and resentful wrath. Light is mightier than lightning. Thunder is harmless; it is a mere collision and crashing together of electric clouds. Meekness endures longer than wrath, has greater staying power, feeds itself upon the very grace of God, and is sustained through long watching and much suffering. Wrath fumes and splutters, and brings upon itself swift destruction. Wrath is altogether unprofitable; it convinces no one; it is mere explosion ending in impotence and humiliation. Grievous words stir up anger as certainly as an effect follows its cause. They lead to recrimination, resentment, self-defence, and self-assertion. For the moment they seem to be smart and spirited, betraying a dignified temper and a haughty courage, but in reality they are nothing more than proofs of littleness, spitefulness, chagrin, or other emotion lying on the same degraded line. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Turning away wrath*:—We greatly need an instrument capable of turning away wrath, for there is much wrath in the world to be turned away. If all our anger were grief for sin, and grief for sin our only danger, the emotion would neither displease God nor disturb men. Most of the anger that prevails is sinful and dangerous. We are on dangerous ground when we are contending in our own cause. A man may indeed, through Divine grace, rule his spirit aright even there; but it is his wisdom to be jealous of himself. Self-love ties a bandage over the eyes of the understanding, and then leads the blind astray. In man as he is, a sally of wrath from another seems to produce a similar sally in return, as naturally as a mountain-side gives back an echo of the sound that strikes it. Wrath generates grievous words, and grievous words aggravate the wrath that produced them. The most important practical rule, for our guidance under provocation, is to consider, not how hard a blow we can deal in return, consistently with a character for Christian meekness, but how far can we yield without being faithless to truth and to God. In view of our own corruption, and the temptations that abound, a leaning to this side seems the safest for a Christian name. But when all rules fail to meet the case, let us have recourse to the great Example. Jesus is God’s answer to the wrath of man. The answer is soft, and yet it is the greatest power that can be applied—the only power that will prevail to turn the wrath away, and win the wrathful back to love. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Bad temper to be controlled*:—Bad temper causes more suffering than the modified severity with which we judge it would imply. It is in a home what toothache is in the body: the pain is insufferable and yet it is not treated as serious. A passionate man or woman spreads a pervading sense of irritation in the house or in the workshop, and all the other occupants of the place are as if they dwelt in a country subject to earthquakes; life for them is divided between anxiety to avoid the explosion and a painful effort to repair its devastations. We are not severe enough on these faults of temper in ourselves or in others; we are too prone to excuse them on the ground of temperament, as if we were no more responsible for outbreaks of passion than for the colour of our hair or the tone of our complexion. Probably here the plea will be urged that we cannot help our temper, and it may be said, the suffering which it brings upon us is the best proof that it is an infirmity rather than a vice. Now this excuse cannot be allowed to pass; a certain good bishop on one occasion hearing it urged, in extenuation of a man’s conduct, that he had such an unfortunate temper, exclaimed, “Temper, why temper is nine-tenths of Christianity!” If we are not to be blamed for bad temper, then there is no fault or defect or vice which we cannot shift off our own shoulders and lay to the charge of our constitution. But our constitution is no excuse for sin; the most that can be urged is that if we are constitutionally inclined to any particular sin we must seek for a special strength to fortify us against it. In Christ Jesus are forces,

moral and spiritual, strong enough to control the most uncontrollable rage and to soothe the most irritable temper; and as we can point to no other power which is sufficient for such a change, so few things manifest so strikingly the blessed presence of Christ in the heart as the softened and gentle temper, the removal of all those explosive elements which before He entered were constantly causing trouble and suffering and alarm. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *The Christian government of the tongue*:—I. THE GRACIOUS POWER OF “A SOFT ANSWER.” It is not intended here to state a bare philosophical fact, the result of observation and experience. Here is a truth intimately connected with man’s present and future peace. In our intercourse with men our object is liable to be misinterpreted, and our motive to be misconceived. There arise occasions when indignation seems to acquire the attribute of a duty, possibly of a religious duty. Beware of giving way to a hasty spirit. A little delay would have calmed your spirit; a little inquiry might have produced an explanation. II. THE GRIEVOUS POWER OF AN ANGRY ANSWER. It is not a light matter to be warned that we bear about within us a fire, which needs only to be quickened and blown up by the breath of man’s mouth to produce in its ravages upon ourselves and others the most cruel and disastrous issues. This is the end at which we must aim, and after which we must never cease to strive and pray until it has been attained, that the law of God may reign supreme in all our hearts, enlightening the understanding, inclining the will, subduing all unhallowed passions, purifying and sanctifying even lawful affections, and “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.” Forbearance is oftentimes a difficult and a painful duty, the incentive to retaliation quick and urgent. At such times we need to prove the power of prayer. (*Geo. Spence, D.C.L.*) *Words*:—Few writers, ancient or modern, say so much about words as Solomon. “Words,” says Richter, “are often everywhere as the minute hands of the soul, more important than even the hour hands of action.” I. THE PACIFYING AND IRRITATING POWER OF WORDS. 1. The pacifying power of words. “A soft answer turneth away wrath.” Several things are implied in this short passage. (1) The existence of anger against you. (2) The importance of turning away this anger. (3) There is an effective method of turning away this wrath. That is a “soft answer.” A response free from excitement and resentment, uttered in the low tone of magnanimous forbearance. 2. The irritating power of words. “Grievous words stir up anger.” II. THE RIGHT AND THE WRONG USE OF WORDS. 1. The right use of words. “The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright.” 2. The wrong use of words. The fool’s heart is full of folly, and folly flows from his lips. Foolish words are either words without meaning, empty jargon, or words of bad meaning, the vehicles of filth, insubordination, and blasphemy. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *A soft answer*:—It was Abigail’s gentle apology that disarmed David’s fury; and Gideon’s mild and modest answer stilled the hot and hasty Ephraimites. Lay but a flint upon a pillow and you break it easily, but hard to hard will never do the deed. It is not the vieing one angry word with another; grievous words stir up strife—harsh and angry words cast oil upon the flame; set the passions afloat, there is no hope, not one wise word to be expected. (*J. Spencer.*) *Try the velvet*:—There is sound philosophy, as well as religion, in the advice of a cheerful man to his surly neighbour, who had just given a cross answer to the inquiries of some children who had lost their way:—“Jim, a man’s tongue is like a cat’s. It is either a piece of velvet, or a piece of sand-paper, just as he chooses to use it and to make it; and I declare you always seem to use your tongue for sand-paper. Try the velvet, man; try the velvet!” (*Blind Amos.*) *A soft answer*:—Taking a stroll in the country one bright spring morning, a sudden turn in the road brought me to a clear, running stream. A little rustic bridge was thrown across it, and the whole scene formed such a pretty picture, I stopped to gaze upon it. While thus engaged a steady-looking errand-boy came posting over the bridge, with a shallow basket full of packages hanging on his arm. At the same instant a merry little lad appeared in the opposite direction, and carelessly running past the other, inadvertently pushed against his basket, and knocking it over, more than half the contents were sent rolling in the dust. The colour mounted to the errand-boy’s cheeks in a moment—his eyes flashed, he threw down the basket, and prepared to avenge the affront and give battle-royal to his adversary. The innocent author of the mischief, however, looked up in his face with a pleasant smile, and exclaimed, “Now, really, I’m so sorry; but I’ll help you to pick them all up again as fast as I can, and you see it wasn’t as if I’d done it on purpose!” All anger thereupon vanished from the countenance of the aggrieved party, who

was not one of those implacable beings on whom "a soft answer" is thrown away. The two boys set cheerfully to work, and soon replaced the fallen goods, after which, with light hearts, they went whistling on their different roads. I pursued mine, musing on the wisdom of the cottage lad, and thinking how many quarrels, great and small, might be avoided by timely acknowledgment and ready explanation. There seemed something beyond mere good-nature in our little rustic; was not perhaps his simple reply an "answer of the tongue from the Lord"? *A soft answer*.—The celebrated Abou Yûsuph, who was chief judge of Bagdad, in the reign of the Caliph Hâdee, was a very remarkable instance of that humility which distinguishes true wisdom. His sense of his own deficiencies often led him to entertain doubts, where men of less knowledge and more presumption were decided. "It is related of this judge, that on one occasion, after a very patient investigation of facts, he declared that his knowledge was not competent to decide upon the case before him. 'Pray, do you expect,' said a pert courtier, who heard this declaration, 'that the Caliph is to pay for your ignorance?' 'I do not,' was the mild reply: 'the Caliph pays me, and well, for what I do know; if he were to attempt to pay me for what I do not know, the treasures of his empire would not suffice.'" (*Malcolm's Persia*.)

Ver. 3. **The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.**—*On the omniscience of God*.—I. PROVE THIS DOCTRINE.—1. Where a cause or agent acts, there that cause or agent must virtually be. The power of the Almighty Father is manifest in every part of creation. The Divine agency is very different from any laws of mechanism, or operations of chance, that we can even imagine. These can relate only to matter, while the former comprehends instincts and passions, reason and imagination; the minds of intellectual creatures in their origin, their endless diversity, and progress to perfection. The Supreme Cause, therefore, is ever acting, and ever present. His presence governs, animates, and preserves the whole universe of existence. 2. Another argument may be derived from the consciousness of the human soul in the moment of transgression. This consciousness, and its effects, are not originally produced by prejudice and superstition, but are the great moral instinct of our nature. Given us by our heavenly Father, it serves as an additional sense to remind us of His continual presence, then, when we chiefly need it, in the season of temptation and in the hour of guilt. Further, the omnipresence of God follows, as a natural consequence, from His wisdom and His power. And it seems absolutely necessary to that perfect justice which we are assured He will render to every man at the last day. II. SHOW THE ADVANTAGES WE OUGHT TO DERIVE FROM THIS TRUTH. 1. It is one of the highest privileges of our nature. In the course of nature, and in the affairs of mankind, are found His (1) Sustaining and (2) Directing power. That God sustains and upholds all things alone can account for our bodies putting themselves in motion at the command of our wills; or for the curious circulation of the blood within our veins; or for the adhesion of matter; or for the descent of all bodies toward the earth, which the philosophers call gravitation. Prophecies and miracles prove that God directs and interposes in our human affairs. If God sustains and upholds all things here below by His power, this calls upon us reasonable creatures to exert ourselves in praise and thanksgiving, in all the other duties of gratitude and in prayer. (*Bp. Z. Pearce*.) *The eye of God on the sons of men*.—The great truths of divinity are of great use to enforce the precepts of morality. 1. An eye to discern all; not only from which nothing can be concealed, but by which everything is actually inspected, and nothing overlooked or looked slightly upon. Secret sins, services, and sorrows are under His eye. 2. An eye to distinguish both persons and actions. He is displeased with the evil, and approves of the good, and will judge men according to the sight of His eyes (*Psa. i. 6; xi. 4*.) (*Matthew Henry*.) *The diffusiveness of the Divine Spirit*.—The Divine Spirit penetrates, pervades, and actuates the whole mass of beings, and is intimately conscious to every motion and operation throughout the whole extent of created nature. In the text God is described as intimately present with moral agents and with human minds. I. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF GOD'S BEING. 1. By way of similitude, consider the operations of a human soul in and upon a human body. How our spirits actuate our bodies is one of those mysteries which we cannot penetrate. But we are conscious of the power, though we know not how we came by it. The fact is undisputed, that the mind is present at once to each and every part of our little world, animates with its constant influences every particle of our vital clay, keeps

watchful guard upon all the avenues and portals of our senses, at the same time presiding in the more secret chambers of sublimer thought and finer speculation. So related, it is incapable of division or diminution, of composition or separation. Imagine the Spirit of God thus acting through every part and portion of the universe, yet with a fulness of power and perfection, neither limited by it, nor passive in any degree or manner from it—imagine Him superintending the whole with the united efficacy of His wisdom, goodness, and power, and you will then have as clear a notion of His presence with the whole system of created nature as you have of that intercourse which your own souls maintain with your bodies. But you must be careful to exclude from this comparison whatever shall imply any passiveness in God, or any limitation of His infinite mind. 2. The Scriptures have represented God as present in some places more, or rather, than in others, and most eminently above all, in the peculiar habitation of His holiness and glory. Explain this by reference to the former comparison. While the human soul actuates each part and particle of our human body, the head is the manifest laboratory of its finest and noblest operations, where it exerts the purest and brightest and strongest acts of contrivance and invention of thought and understanding. Now, what the soul of man is formed to do by the skill and wisdom of its heavenly Architect, He may choose for Himself to do, upon the reasons of state and providence, which He hath partly revealed to us, and partly concealed within the veil of His hidden counsels. No reason can be given why the same uniform, simple, undivided Essence must equally everywhere exert itself, or why it may not manifest its acts and operations more, and rather, in one place than another. 3. As place hath in strictness a near relation to bodies, and to the order of their several positions and situations, the idea of local presence is apt to mix itself with that relation when we apply it to spirits. It is better to speak of the Divine presence as a vital energy, a knowing influence, a powerful activity. His presence with all things acquaints Him with all things, and makes all things easy to Him. II. CONSIDER THE DIVINE SPIRIT AS PRESENT WITH MORAL AGENTS AND HUMAN MINDS.

1. A disquisition of the fact. Of this fact there will be little question, if the premises are agreed to. Surely moral truths, and the eternal differences between good and evil, will plead as strongly for a close regard to them as any degrees of symmetry or beauty, of harmony or proportion in the natural world, shall engage the attention of a curious observer. Much more amiable and entertaining must be the spectacle of moral than of any natural beauty. 2. The uses we should make of this fact. The sinner may reasonably stand aghast with terror and confusion at the deformity of his own actions. He is breaking in upon the counsels of eternity, and thwarting the purposes of Divine wisdom and holiness in the sight of his awful Governor, and the observation of his all-seeing Judge. 3. Let the good man consider the comforts he may derive from a sense of God's constant presence with him. His Maker observes him in all his pressures; in all the difficulties and conflicts of virtue. 4. Let us all be persuaded to live and to behave in every circumstance of life like a people sensible who is the Spectator, and who is to be the Judge of all their actions. Cicero advised that we should habituate our imaginations to the view of some person eminent for the gravity and sanctity of his manners; should suppose ourselves in his presence, and carry ourselves in all points as we would before him. How much more should a sense of the all-seeing eye control us; the presence of Him who is a lover of righteousness in others, and a sure avenger of all ungodliness and wrong. (*N. Marshall, D.D.*) *The Divine omniscience*.—I. CONSIDER THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD, AS IT IS AN ESSENTIAL ATTRIBUTE OF HIS NATURE. 1. That this knowledge is essentially inherent in the Divine nature is evident from the creation of the world. For as the beautiful variety of beings conspicuous in the universe were made by God, He must necessarily know the things He has made. Infinite power presupposes, or at least implies, infinite knowledge. Suppose some skilful artist to have framed a moving machine, consisting of various parts, and capable of performing many wonderful operations; it will perhaps puzzle divers spectators to explain, or even conceive the contexture of its parts, and the secret springs by which it moves; but will any man say the artist himself who made the machine is ignorant of the several parts of which it is composed, or that he knows not by what artful contrivance it is made to move? Is man, then, acquainted with the operations of his own hands, and can we suppose the Supreme Being to be ignorant of His? 2. Another argument to prove the omniscience of God may be drawn from the consideration of providence. If God presides over the whole universe, and governs all things both in heaven and earth,

is it possible for Him to be ignorant of anything in the system of humanity? If He be the sovereign disposer of human creatures and their affairs, must He not perfectly understand their constitution and conduct? 3. Another argument to confirm the truth of God's omniscience may be taken from divers remarkable events that have happened in the world through the miraculous interposition of Providence. Who can reflect upon the various revolutions which happened to the ancient Israelites without feeling manifest traces of the Divine knowledge? For was it possible for the Almighty to have interposed in delivering that oppressed people from the cruel persecutions of Egypt if He had not previously known the condition they were in? Or how could He have framed a scheme of government so suitable to the genius of that untractable people if He had not thoroughly understood their natural tempers and most hidden inclinations? 4. To confirm this truth, besides the arguments already alleged there is another, which may be drawn from the idea of infinite perfection. For if God be a Being infinitely perfect, He must be infinitely knowing. II. CONSIDER THIS ATTRIBUTE OF THE DEITY, AS IT IS A POWERFUL MOTIVE TO DESTROY US FROM SIN, AND ENGAGE US TO THE PRACTICE OF VIRTUE. It is the advice of Seneca to his friend Lucilius, that he should bear in his mind the idea of Socrates, or Cato, or some other excellent man, and imagine him to be a constant observer of his actions. This the philosopher proposes as a useful expedient to keep a man constantly virtuous in the whole conduct of his life. Let, therefore, the Searcher of all hearts, the Almighty, let Him be our Socrates, and our Cato; and if we judge it a matter of disgrace to do unworthy actions before a wife, friend, or philosopher, think what eternal shame we expose ourselves to when we sin before the all-seeing eyes of God. (*N. Ball.*) *The omnipresent eye of God*:—1. When we are alone this truth should be ever with us to keep us from the temptation of evil thoughts and purposes. 2. In our families this truth should make us watchful over our tempers, anxious to consult each other's wishes and feelings. 3. In society it should make us give great heed to our words, and be temperate in all things; it should make masters remember that they have a Master in heaven; and servants should be incited by it to perform their duties not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. 4. In sorrow it should lead us, as it did Job, to be patient and resigned, and to put our trust in God. 5. In sin, when we are so unhappy as to fall into sin, the presence of the Lord should lead us, as it did St. Peter, to repentance. 6. Lastly, and above all, the recollection of this truth should be with us in church. For if we are assured that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place," we are also assured that they are specially in this place. (*R. Ward, M.A.*) *The eyes of the Lord are everywhere*:—1. Scripture instances of God's beholding the various works of men. He beholds the evil. See cases of Cain and Abel, Achan, &c. He beholds the good. See cases of Noah, Jacob, &c. Each act, each thought, each hope and fear of a man, is open to the sight of his God. 2. The character of the all-seeing One. The all-seeing God is a person, not a mere abstract name for nature. The Lord is not only a person, but also one who always remembers. The all-seeing God is not indifferent to the acts of men, and their characters are before Him. He who sees the evil and the good is all-powerful to punish and reward. (*H. Constable, M.A.*) *The eyes of the Lord*:—"And we do fearfully live, as it were, out of God's atmosphere. We do not keep that continual consciousness of His reality which, I conceive, we ought to have, and which should make Him more manifest to our souls than the Shekinah was to the minds of the Israelites." Thus wrote Dr. Arnold, of Rugby; and I think no one of us can read the words and not feel they say a truth. "Dare to be alone with God," wrote the true-hearted preacher, F. W. Robertson, to a friend. "Dare to be alone with God." Why should not the child gladly seek the Father's presence? The Indians of South America told the missionaries, "You say the God of the Christians knows everything, that nothing is hidden from Him; that He is everywhere and sees all that is done. But we do not desire a God so sharp-sighted; we choose to live with freedom in our woods, without having a perpetual observer over our heads." And the savages but said forth a feeling in which men civilised naturally share; for from purity conscious impurity slinks. Men may quarrel with the doctrine of depravity as they choose, but this instinctive hiding themselves from the eyes of the Lord is steady proof of the doctrine of a universal moral lapse. Consider, men are always trying to put out the eyes of the Lord. By atheism—letting the bad, foolish heart tell the head there is no God. By semi-panteism—denying personality to God, calling Him "a stream of tendency." Simply a vague, impersonal "power not ourselves".

by trying to think of God in the ancient epicurean fashion, making Him but a huge and listless carelessness, as Thomas Carlyle so finely stigmatizes the notion, "an absentee God, sitting on the outside of His universe, and seeing it go"; by identifying God with law, hiding the thought and truth of God away in the muffling folds of natural law, and so imagining that they are somehow getting themselves out of God's real jurisdiction; by a sensual carelessness of God, living as though there were no God, though all the time His being and presence are theoretically confessed. But yet the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Therefore—1. We, in our conscious sinfulness before their gaze, need atonement for our sin. 2. And the readjustment with God the Holy Spirit works in us by regeneration. 3. And the sweet consciousness of forgiveness. 4. And so the making possible the noble bravery of welcoming His vision into our hearts and lives, that we may shun the evil and seize the good; and thus the living the true life only to be lived in "God's atmosphere." (*Homiletic Review*.)

Ver. 4. **A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.**—*A wholesome tongue a tree of life*:—When the tongue is guided by the Spirit of God and by the words of Holy Scripture it may impart truth and express and elicit thoughts which may be salutary to those who come under their influence. Then it is as if a man, in hearing the words spoken, did eat the fruit of the tree of life in God's primitive and undesolated garden. I. WHAT TOPICS OF DISCOURSE WILL MAKE OUR TONGUE A TREE OF LIFE? 1. It is no tree of life when it lies. God is a God of truth, and if the tongue speaks falsely it is an instrument of unrighteousness. 2. It is no tree of life when it defames and utters scandal, whether this proceed from the thought of your own mind or whether it be taken from a neighbour. 3. It is no tree of life when it blasphemes. There are irreverent speeches respecting God which are a shame and dishonour for a man to utter, and which are painful and injurious to the auditors. 4. It is no tree of life when it propagates error; when it teaches and preaches false doctrine. 5. It is no tree of life when the words are vicious or unholy. If conversation is false, defamatory, foolish, irreverent, you grieve the Holy Spirit of God. There are four great regions of truth in which the tongue may do its duty to man and glorify God; so that, according to the metaphor of the text, the tree may open its ample branches, presenting fruit so luscious and refreshing that all who pass by may eat and regale themselves. (1) It has liberty when it speaks of the works of God in creation. (2) The second great region is the providence of God, or the government of God, in His watchfulness over the affairs of men. (3) Then there is the Word of God. There is not a verse or sentence from the beginning to the end which may not be the subject of investigation and of discourse. (4) A tongue may be wholesome when we speak of things that are especially suitable to the circumstances of the people whom we are addressing, such as those who need comfort and those who are exposed to temptation. It may be added that the tongue is a tree of life when it speaks of the world before us and of the life to come. II. THE TIMES AND SEASONS OF THE FRUITFULNESS OF THE TONGUE AS A TREE OF LIFE. 1. In the sanctuary the tongue of a righteous minister is a tree of life. 2. Our tongue may be a tree of life in our families, at our morning and evening repast, and daily, as we meet at table. 3. When we teach the young. 4. In our ordinary intercourse with one another. Every sentiment we advance is a seed that will go elsewhere. 5. And at the bedside of the sick and dying. The tongue is a small member, but it boasteth great things. It may be the instrument of great evil or of amazing good. The tongue of man is the pivot on which the whole system of human society moves. Then ask for wisdom, that the tongue may utter knowledge. Ask for a renewed mind, that there may be sanctified speech. (*James Stratten*.) *Salutary discourse*:—"A wholesome tongue" may be read, "the healing of the tongue," by which is meant, "words of healing." Salutary discourse or conversation is highly beneficial. I. THIS IS EXEMPLIFIED IN JESUS CHRIST. All His words were words of healing. It is true that He reproved, and sometimes with pointed severity; but it was as a skilful surgeon, who probes the festering wound in order to an effectual cure. II. THIS IS EXEMPLIFIED IN MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL. St. Paul. III. THIS IS EXEMPLIFIED IN PRIVATE CHRISTIANS. Of what nature is the discourse of such persons? It ought certainly to be beneficial, and in order to this it must be consistent with truth, with piety, with candour, and with benevolence. Improvement: If a "wholesome tongue is a tree of life," the opposite is an instrument of death. (*T. Kidd*.) *The tamed tongue*:—A wholesome

tongue is one whose speech is not corrupting nor irritating, but full of nourishment and helpfulness—sound and sweet and salutary. Such a tongue is a tree of life. Wise words proceed from it as naturally as the leaves grow upon the branches; beautiful and fitting words adorn it as the blossoms adorn the tree. I. THE TAMED TONGUE IS TRAINED FOR SERVICE. All things that are tamed are tamed for the service of man, and the tongue follows this law. It is by speech that many of our best gains are made. A large part of the good which we receive comes to us in conversation. Opinions are formed in this way: knowledge is acquired, good impulses are received, we are stimulated and cheered by our conversation. The interchange of thought is most valuable to us. When our tongue is rightly trained it will be a most diligent purveyor of knowledge. II. THE TONGUE WILL SERVE OUR OWN NEEDS IN QUITE ANOTHER WAY. The reaction upon our own minds of truth which we have expressed, of worthy purposes or sentiments which we have avowed, is most beneficent. We fix our thoughts by putting them into words and uttering them. The wise and temperate utterance of manly feeling reacts in the same way upon ourselves. III. THE TONGUE IS ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE AGENCIES IN COMMUNICATING TRUTH. The printed word now plays a great part in the education of mankind, but written instruction will never supersede oral instruction. The tongue will always have a function, and a large one, in the communication of truth. Shades of meaning can be conveyed by the lips which the types cannot suggest. We learn truth through conversation; we may teach it in the same way. IV. THE MORAL INVIGORATION OF OTHERS MAY BE MOST EFFECTUALLY PROMOTED BY SANCTIFIED SPEECH. As a matter of fact, the greater part of the moral and religious influence that is exerted in the world passes from one soul to another in the form of familiar talk. V. WE DO PEOPLE GOOD BY MAKING THEM HAPPY. And there lies in kind winning words a wonderful power of adding to the happiness of our fellow-men. There is no little pleasure in listening to beautiful words or graceful words—as those of artists in verse or prose. Oh, the power there is in kind words to soothe, to uplift, to cheer, to bless the souls of men! VI. SANCTIFIED SPEECH HAS THE POWER TO CONQUER, TO QUELL, TO SUBDUCE. The soft tongue breaketh the bone; the tamed tongue subdues the adversary. VII. AND SANCTIFIED SPEECH FURNISHES AN OUTLET FOR THE THANKFULNESS OF THE HEART. To the praise of God all that is highest and noblest in man continually summons him. Reasons for thankfulness are not wanting now to any of us. If we are silent it is not because there is no call for praise. (*Washington Gladden, D.D.*) *The speech of the wise and of the foolish:—*I. THE SPEECH OF THE WISE. 1. It is a healing speech. The wholesome tongue, or, literally, as in the margin, a healing tongue, is a tree of life. There are wounded souls in society; souls wounded by insults, slanders, bereavements, disappointments, losses, moral conviction. There is a speech that is healing to those wounds, and that speech is used by the wise. There are societies, too, that are wounded by divisions, animosities. There is a speech which heals social divisions, and the wise employ it. 2. It is a living speech. "It is a tree of life." It is at once the product and producer of life. The speech of the wise is not the vehicle of sapless platitudes, it is the offspring of living conviction. It is a germ falling from the ever-growing tree of living thought, and it produces life too. "Cast forth," says Carlyle, "thy act, thy word, into the everlasting, evergrowing universe: it is a seed-grain that cannot die unnoticed to-day; it will be found flourishing as a banyan grove—perhaps." But the word of the wise is not as a hemlock seed; it is a seed that falls from that tree of life which is to be for the healing of the nations. 3. It is an enlightening speech. "The lips of the wise disperse knowledge." The words of the wise are beams reflected from the great Sun of Truth, and they break upon the darkness with which error has clouded the world. II. THE SPEECH OF THE FOOLISH. 1. The speech of the foolish is a wounding speech. "Perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit." 2. The speech of the foolish is an empty speech. The heart is here the antithesis to the lips. The foolish man does not disperse knowledge, but the wise does. The fool has no knowledge to disperse. (*Homilist.*) *A wholesome tongue:—*1. Not a silent tongue: mere abstinence from evil is not good. The beasts that perish speak no guile; what do ye more than they? The tongue of man is a talent. 2. Not a smooth tongue: it may be soft on the surface, while the poison of asps lies cherished underneath. "The mouth of a strange woman is smoother than oil." A serpent licks his victim all over before he swallows it. Smoothness is not an equivalent for truth. 3. Not a voluble tongue: that active member may labour much to little purpose. It may revolve with the rapidity and steadiness of

manufacturing machinery, throwing off from morning till night a continuous web of wordage, and yet not add one grain to the stock of human wisdom by the imposing bulk of its weightless product. 4. Not a sharp tongue: some instruments are made keen-edged for the purpose of wounding (chap. xii. 18). 5. Not even a true tongue: truth is the foundation of all good in speech, but it is the foundation only. Truth is necessary, but not enough. The true tongue must also be wholesome. Before anything can be wholesome in its effects on others it must be whole in itself. The tongue must be itself in health before it can diffuse a healthful influence. But our tongue, as an instrument of moral agency, is diseased. It is in the human constitution the chief outgate from the heart, and the heart of the fallen is not in health. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. In the house of the righteous is much treasure.—*The wealth and blessedness of a pious family*:—I. THERE IS THE WORSHIP OF GOD IN A PIOUS FAMILY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, "MUCH TREASURE." II. THERE IS THE BENEDICTION OF HEAVEN REALISED BY A PIOUS FAMILY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, MUCH TREASURE. III. THERE IS THE PREVALENCE OF LOVE IN A PIOUS FAMILY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, MUCH TREASURE. IV. THERE IS TENDER AND CHRISTIAN SYMPATHY IN AFFLICTION MANIFESTED BY A PIOUS FAMILY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, "IN THE HOUSE OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS MUCH TREASURE." V. THERE IS AN EARNEST AND PARAMOUNT DESIRE TO DO GOOD CHERISHED BY A PIOUS FAMILY, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, IN SUCH A HOUSE THERE IS "MUCH TREASURE." VI. THERE IS NOT ONLY THE PROSPECT, BUT THE WELL-GROUNDED HOPE, MAINTAINED BY A PIOUS FAMILY, OF MEETING BEYOND THE GRAVE, AND, CONSEQUENTLY, IN SUCH A HOUSE THERE IS MUCH TREASURE. (*T. Wallace.*) *God's smile the best treasure*:—One smile of God is better than all the treasures of the world. If the sun be wanting, it will be night for all the stars; and if the light of God's countenance be wanting, if He frown upon us, a man may sit in the shadow of death for all the glisten of worldly contentments. (*J. Stoughton, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.—*Two worshippers contrasted*:—The opposition here implied is twofold, relating, first to the character, and then to the consequence, of two varieties or extremes of prayer. "The sacrifice of the wicked" will be one of two things; it will either be what we may designate the sacrifice of falsehood, or what Holy Scripture has denounced as "the sacrifice of fools." The latter are outlined in one brief, but most emphatic phrase—"they consider not that they do evil." The evil lies in their not considering. The term applies to all heedless and unreflecting worship; that which neither occupies the understanding, nor affects the heart. And the absence of consideration within the house of God is itself equivalent to rebellion. Directly opposed to the "sacrifice of the wicked," we have "the prayer of the upright." This implies sincerity; then solemn, serious, and devout consideration. "Upright" here does not denote a perfection of moral integrity; which is rarely, if ever, found in men. A sacrifice of falsehood is the act of the outward; the sacrifice of truth is the act of the inward man. The "prayer of the upright" is based upon consideration, and reflection. It is first the offspring, and then the companion, of thought. (*Thomas Dale, M.A.*) **But the prayer of the upright is His delight.**—*Difficulties and ignorance in prayer*:—Prayer is one of the surest tests both of Christian conviction and Christian character. The clear consciousness and firm conviction of God compel frequency and gladness in prayer. The character of a Christian can be almost unmistakably told by the character of his prayers. Prayer is a crucial touchstone of the spiritual life. What is this prayer? Words are generally, not always, necessary to prayer. It is only the insincerity of repetitions that makes them vain. There are occasions when prayer in words is impossible. Thinking over our prayers, without actually saying them, is generally nothing better than a kind of spiritual indolence. But not until words are the true expression of the wishes of the heart, the audible movement of the inmost soul, are they clothed with the character of prayer. Prayer is often hard and exhausting work. It is often difficult, because our hearts are idle and errant; and because prayer is essentially submission. Of all hard things none is more hard than the surrender of the will. There is peace and strength in prayer, but there is also toil and unspeakable sacrifice. God protects us, in our prayers, against ourselves. He will not suffer our ignorance to be our ruin, and only grants such prayers as are for our own good. Unanswered prayers may be an evidence of the love of God and the ignorance of man. Prayers prompted by the Holy Spirit are never unanswered prayers. (*Canon*

Diggle.) *God's delight in the prayer of the upright* :—God takes great pleasure in the prayers of upright men ; He even calls them His delight. Our first concern is to be upright. Neither bending this way nor that, continue upright ; not crooked with policy, nor prostrate by yielding to evil, be ye upright in strict integrity and straightforwardness. If we begin to shuffle and shift, we shall be left to shift for ourselves. If we try crooked ways, we shall find that we cannot pray, and if we pretend to do so, we shall find our prayers shut out of heaven. Are we acting in a straight line, and thus following out the Lord's revealed will ? Then let us pray much, and pray in faith. If our prayer is God's delight, let us not stint Him in that which gives Him pleasure. He does not consider the grammar of it, nor the metaphysics of it, nor the rhetoric of it ; in all these men might despise it. He, as a Father, takes pleasure in the lisplings of His own babes, the stammerings of His newborn sons and daughters. Should we not delight in prayer since the Lord delights in it ? Let us make errands to the throne. The Lord finds us enough reasons for prayer, and we ought to thank Him that it is so. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Let us pray :—I have heard it said that God has no pleasure in the prayer of sinners. I believe that that statement is altogether apart from the truth as it is in Jesus. It would be an ill day for us indeed if it were even partially true, that God has no ready heart for the cry of the penitent. Provided there be a desire to have the sin put away, we can come with our defilement fresh and hideous upon us, for the fountain is opened for sin and for uncleanness. What, then, is the meaning of these strong terms ? It is the knell of those who make pretence of prayer, who come with blood-stained hands, and offer sacrifice with hearts that are neither cleansed nor wish for cleansing. It is the sacrifice of Cain that God abhors, a matter of self-glorifying, rather than of supplication. It is the offering of Korah He rejects, for it is not according to His command. It is the sacrifice that Saul presents that is a stench to His nostrils, for it is not in accordance with His instructions. Is not this perfectly understandable ? Who is willing to accept feigned praise, or presents from his enemies ?

I. GOD DELIGHTS TO HEAR THE UPRIGHT PRAY. I think the prayer of the upright is here put in contradistinction to the sacrifice of the wicked. The wicked man may go to great pains to provide something more than a prayer. It may have even cost him something considerable. But he has not attended to the main matter ; his heart goes not with the sacrifice. On the other hand, here is an upright man, who, perhaps, has no opportunity for offering special gifts. He comes with a sigh, and ere it reaches heaven it is transformed into a song. Now, why does the Lord take such pleasure in the mere prayer of the upright ?

1. Because it is a sign of life. It may be a feeble token, but it is an indication that there is life to some extent in that poor, distressed one. The prayer of the upright is God's delight, for He says within Himself, " My child still lives ; his spiritual pulse is beating, his lungs are working, for his prayer ascends into My holy temple."
2. Moreover, the prayer of the upright is an indication of health. It does not content us, that we merely live : we want to be lively as well as living ; may I say we want to be all alive ? Therefore is the prayer of the upright God's delight. He sees that His little ones are buoyant, hearty, and healthful. This is to Him as the sparkling eye and the rosy cheek of health, and He is glad within Himself when He sees His offspring rejoicing in fulness of vigour.
3. Moreover, prayer is a proof of confidence. We all like to be trusted.
4. Again, prayer is a token of gratitude. I think I hear Him saying, " Yonder needy suppliant is glad of the blessing that I gave him yesterday, for he is at My feet again. He appreciates My delivering power in the past, for he is calling for mercy still. I will multiply to bless him." God is glad thus to treat all believing hearts.
5. I think God delights in our prayer because He sees how beneficial it is to us to pray. Apart from the joy it gives His own heart, He is well aware that it brings joy to our hearts.
6. Moreover, I must not have you suppose that I do not believe that prayer moves the arm of God. I am by no means positive that that would keep me praying if I had no other assurance. " The prayer of the upright is His delight," and that should be another stimulus to constant intercession.

II. DO YOU NOT THINK THAT GOD DELIGHTS IN THE PRAYER ITSELF ? " The prayer of the upright is His delight." There is something about the prayer of the upright that particularly rejoices His heart.

1. The prayer of the upright is a humble prayer. It is as the snowdrops of the spring-time, or as

the violet of the early summer. There is something about it so pleasing that God looks on it with great delight. It does not hold up its head like the glaring poppy of the cornfield, or as the sunflower that seems to invite attention. It is like the prayer of the Publican rather than that of the self-admiring Pharisee. 2. The prayer of the upright is earnest. It is pointed; it does not deal with generalities, but with details. It is marked "Urgent." 3. Especially is it the faith of the prayer that pleases God. Faith brings the promises as so many cheques for God to cash. The prayer of faith seems to say, by its very tone, "Lord, do as Thou hast said; remember Thy word to Thy servant, upon which Thou hast caused him to hope." 4. The prayers that God delights in are full of the spirit of resignation. Faith and submission should go hand in hand. 5. And He is particularly glad when He sees the name of Jesus upon the prayer. How gladly does He recognise the aroma of Christ's merit and the fragrance of His death! Prayers presented by you in Jesus' name and then presented by Jesus Christ Himself in your name must give our God great joy. III. THE LORD DELIGHTS TO ANSWER PRAYER. Even with Him it is more blessed to give than it is to receive. He delights in your prayer even when He keeps you waiting, for He will send the answer just when you most require it. It would not be well to have it earlier. (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 11. **Hell and destruction are before the Lord: how much more then the hearts of the children of men?**—*God the all-seeing One*:—I. A GREAT FACT DECLARED. 1. The word translated "hell" might just as well be translated "death," or the state of departed spirits. Death, with all its solemn consequences, is visible before the Lord. God understands all the secrets of death. God knows the burial-places of all His people. He is cognisant of the history of all their bodies after sepulture, or after death. And as the body, so the soul when separated from the body is before the Lord. 2. The word "destruction" signifies "hell," the place of the damned. That also is open before the Lord. That land of terror is to us a land unknown. II. A GREAT FACT INFERRED. 1. Why is it so clear that if "hell and destruction are before the Lord," the hearts of men must be very plainly viewed by Him? We answer, because the hearts of men are not so extensive as the realms of death and torment. They are far less aged too. God may easily understand the history of a man, when He knows the history of the monarchies of death and hell. 2. How does God know the heart? To what degree and extent does He understand and know that which is in man? God searches it; tries it; ponders, or weighs it. 3. What is it that God sees in man's heart? Its evils, imaginations, devices, resolves. 4. When does God see us? Always, and everywhere. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 12. **A scorner loveth not one that reproveth him.**—*The scorner*:—I. HE REQUIRES REPROOF. He should be reproved—1. For his self-ignorance. He who arrogates to himself a superiority to Divine teaching, is utterly unacquainted with his own limited faculties, moral relations, and spiritual needs. Of all ignorance, self-ignorance is the most inexcusable, criminal, and ruinous. He should be reproved—2. For his impious presumption. The scorner sets his mouth against the heavens. II. HE SHUNS REPROOF. "He will not go unto the wise." Why? Because the wise would reprove him. 1. He will not read books that will deal seriously and honestly with his character. 2. He will not attend a ministry that will expose his character in the broad light of eternal law. 3. He will not join the society that will deal truthfully with its members. III. HE HATES REPROOF. "The scorner loveth not one that reproveth him." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 13. **A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance.**—*Mirth a medicine*:—The emotions that thrill in the heart mark themselves in legible lines on the countenance. This is a feature in the constitution of man, and a useful feature it is. The wisdom of our Maker may be seen in the degree of its development. Joy in the heart can do more than make the aspect winsome. Besides enlivening a dull countenance, it heals a diseased nature. There is nothing equal to cheerful and even mirthful conversation for restoring the tone of mind and body when both have been overdone. Mirth, after exhaustive toil, is one of nature's instinctive efforts to heal the part which has been racked and bruised. Even a dull observer may see wisdom and goodness in the habitual cheerfulness of the young. To maintain a patient's cheerfulness often hastens the patient's cure. A bright hope within will sometimes do more to restore the wasted strength than all the prescriptions of the

physician. If Christians could get living hope lighted within, and let it beam like sunlight all the day through an open countenance, their lives would be more legible as epistles of Christ, and more effectual to win souls. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge.—*Seeking knowledge*:—The desire of knowledge is in some sense natural to us all; and it is the duty of us all to cherish that desire; to direct it to proper objects; and to keep it within due bounds. Knowledge is necessary. Conscience may dictate to us that things are right or wrong, but she may be mistaken in her decisions, unless she call in reason to her assistance; for a clear knowledge of morality cannot be obtained without serious consideration and the exercise of our intellectual faculties; nor can the revealed will of God be understood without application of mind. We at first receive the knowledge of things by perception, and then improve it by reflection. The general desire of knowledge is manifested very soon; but it varies in strength. It is meet that there should be men of smaller as well as of larger capacities, that they may be fitted for different ways of life; and this also makes it expedient that there should be various degrees of this propensity toward knowledge. The pleasure of any creature consists in having objects suitable to his faculties. In Scripture, ignorance is styled darkness, which is disagreeable; and truth is called light, which it is pleasant to behold. The enlargement of knowledge will be no small part of the satisfaction which the good will enjoy in a future and better state. Our natural desire of knowledge may be misused, as well as the other inclinations and passions of the human mind. It may be too little; it may be too great; it may be applied to wrong objects. Some persons do not desire knowledge as much as they ought. Some persons mind things less considerable more than those of greater moment. In the Scriptures themselves, all things are not of the same importance. Some things there are which we ought not to know; and a vain curiosity after them constitutes another abuse of our natural desire of knowledge. Sin should only be known as the rocks at sea, that it may be avoided. They also are inexcusable who in speculative points of religion rashly and proudly dogmatise about things which they cannot comprehend. Our understanding is confined within small bounds, and reason and Scripture tell us that no man by searching can find out the Almighty to perfection. Another abuse of our love of knowledge is an impetuous desire of extending it to too many objects; which is the case of some persons who have had a liberal education. Most errors arise from laziness, or rash judgments, or prejudice, or worldly interest, or some favourite passion. Intemperate desire of knowledge, and sometimes of applause or of profit, puts persons upon studies for which they have no genius or capacity. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.—*Domestic love and union recommended and enforced*:—It is hard to form a true estimate of any man's happiness; because happiness depends most upon those things which lie most out of sight. Our good or ill breeding is chiefly seen abroad; our good or ill nature at home. I. THE REASONABLENESS AND ADVANTAGES OF DOMESTIC UNION. Quietness under one's own roof, and quietness in our own conscience, are two substantial blessings. Abroad, we must more or less find tribulation; yet as long as our home is a secure and peaceful retreat from all the disappointments and cares of the world, we may still be tolerably happy. There cannot be a greater curse than to have those of one's own household one's greatest foes; when we neither can live happily with them, nor must think of living apart from them. Love is a tender plant; it must be kept alive by great delicacy, it must be fenced from all inclement blasts, or it will soon drop its head and die. To see a well-regulated family acting as if they were one body informed by one soul is a beautiful scene, and amiable even in the sight of that Being who maketh men to be of one mind in a house. The greatest advantage of a friendly behaviour to domestics (i.e., home people), is, that thereby we contract and cultivate that habit of benevolence which is a necessary qualification for everlasting happiness. The habitual sweetness of our temper, or the habitual badness of it, is not so much contracted by the great and considerable accidents of life, as by our behaviour in little things which befall us every day. Men of a generous education have a more refined humanity, passions more softened and civilised, than those in very low life, where rudeness, ill-manners, and brutality too often prevail. By studying to promote the happiness of those in our home circles, we mould ourselves into those habits which are productive of our own happiness, both here and hereafter.

II. SOME RULES FOR PRESERVING DOMESTIC UNION. 1. Do not delude yourselves with any visionary notions of perfection. Consider men, as they really are, with all their numerous imperfections, and not as you could fondly wish them to be. There are not many who can stand the test of a close inspection. Their virtues shine upon us at a distance. It is upon nearer approach that we descry their failings. Familiarity, though it does not beget contempt, where there is real worth, yet always takes off admiration. 2. Learn to make proper allowance, and to represent failings with all the softenings of humanity. Other men's passions are always insupportable to those that are entirely devoted to their own. The fuller of imperfections any man is, the less able is he to bear with the imperfections of his fellow-creatures. 3. There is a particular tenderness due to persons under any recent affliction, because men are more susceptible of resentment, in proportion to the greatness of their distress. 4. Be sure to observe and practise the rules of good manners. By good manners I mean an assemblage of moral virtues expressed in our outward demeanour, a combination of discretion, circumspection, and civility, submission to our superiors, condescension to our inferiors, affability to all, and a strict regard to decency in all our actions. If you have any talent for saying keen and satirical things, be superior to the talent you possess, by showing how little stress you lay upon it, when it comes into competition with your good-nature. 5. Never make any reply to a person till his passion abates, and the ferment subsides. 6. Avoid what fools call spirit, and men of sense call haughtiness. Persons of sense and virtue will seldom differ about things that are plainly essential to the happiness of the family. Be not ashamed to confess that you have been in the wrong. It is but owing that you now have more sense than you had before. 7. Religion is absolutely necessary to preserve domestic union. Be, then, seriously and solidly good yourselves. Reverence yourself, if you would have your inferiors do so. (*J. Seed, M.A.*)

Ver. 19. **The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns.**—*The hedge of thorns and the plain way*.—I. TAKE THE TEXT IN ITS TEMPORAL BEARINGS. 1. A slothful man is the opposite of a righteous man. A sluggard misses a main part of righteousness. He does not render to God according to the strength lent to him, nor to man according to the work assigned him. He is too idle to be importunate, too slothful to be earnest. He cannot be a righteous man, for slothfulness leads to the neglect of duty in many ways. Every good thing withers in the drought of idleness. All kinds of vices are comprehended in the one vice of sloth. 2. If we avoid sloth we have not done enough, we must also be righteous; we must do that which is right, and kind, and holy. 3. A slothful man's way is like a hedge of thorns. The idler's way is not a desirable way. It is difficult. It is painful. Continue in it, and your way will be blocked up altogether. On the other hand, a righteous man's way becomes plain. When a man walks in integrity, his way is soon made plain to him. In the long run, if a man keeps straight, and walks in strict integrity and faith, the Lord will make darkness light before him, and crooked things straight. II. THE SPIRITUAL TEACHING OF THE TEXT. The spiritual sluggard's way is the way of unbelief, because the opposite of his way is the way of the righteous, which is the way of faith. The way of unbelief is full of thorns. It is a very hard way. It is full of perplexities. It is full of miseries. One of these days the slothful man will come to the end of his way, and he will see that hedge of thorns blocking him out of heaven—blocking him out from God. The way of the righteous is the way of faith, and his way "shall be made plain." Childlike confidence in God shall march on as upon a raised causeway, and always find for itself a road. God is with those who trust in Him; and what or whom shall we fear when God is with us? Sometimes the way of the righteous is mysterious and perplexing. When you do not know your way, ask your Guide. Stand still, and pray. An excellent translation runs thus, "The way of the righteous is a highway." It is the open road, where none may challenge the traveller. He that is in the King's highway is under the King's protection. He that is on the King's highway will come to a good end, for the King has completed that way so that it does not fall short, but leads to a city of habitations, whose builder and maker is God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Vers. 21, 22. **Folly is joy to him that is destitute of wisdom.**—*The young warned against folly*.—I. WHAT ARE THOSE FOLLIES IN SPECULATION AND FANCY WHICH ARE JOY TO THE MAN WITHOUT WISDOM? 1. I may advert to the absurd opinions set forth by

extravagant theorists, who have exulted in them as solving difficulties in political and moral science which have perplexed the wise for ages, and as leading to the most valuable improvements in the condition and character of man. 2. Under this head, romantic imaginations may be specified, or all those gay expectations of prosperity and happiness which are suggested by a vain conceit of a man's own powers, by the dictates of a sanguine temper, and by false ideas of the world. 3. The reveries of enthusiasm may also be classed among these follies of fancy. 4. I shall only mention further the delusions of the self-righteous man, who cherishes the presumptuous conceit of his own merit, and disregards the righteousness of Christ. This delusion deserves a worse name than folly, for it rejects the noblest gift of heaven, and pours contempt on the precious blood of Jesus. II. I proceed now to call your attention to those FOLLIES IN CONVERSATION which you ought to avoid. 1. It is not my intention to speak of the grosser offences in conversation, since for these folly is too gentle a name. Nor do I mean to comprehend under this epithet all those sallies of humour which enliven social intercourse by their pleasantry. I wish to repress only what the apostle calls "foolish talkings and jestings which are not convenient." 2. How much idle talking is there about amusements and fashions, and the family concerns of others. 3. I add that they are chargeable with folly in conversation whose lips are filled with vain boasting. Such persons are always heard with disgust. III. I proceed now to specify some of those FOLLIES IN CONDUCT against which you ought to guard. 1. The first that I mention is imprudent connections. Much of our comfort and success in life depends on the alliances which we form. 2. Improper habits should be carefully avoided. Indolence. Profusion. Procrastination. Rashness. Changeableness. 3. Pernicious amusements. IV. I shall now suggest some MEANS BY WHICH YOU MAY BE PRESERVED FROM THE FOLLIES AGAINST WHICH I HAVE WARNED YOU. 1. Meditate frequently on the laws of God which forbid them (Psa. lxxxv. 8; Prov. ix. 6; Eph. v. 15, 16). 2. Meditate frequently on the punishment which God threatens to inflict on those who indulge in folly (chap. i. 32; xix. 29; iii. 35; x. 21). 3. Cherish a taste for wisdom. 4. Implore the influences of Divine grace to keep you from folly, and to guide you in the ways of true wisdom (Jas. i. 5, 6). 5. Often reflect on the shortness and uncertainty of life. Have we time for folly? What if death should find us forming senseless projects, instead of preparing for eternity? (*H. Belfrage.*)

Ver. 22. Without counsel purposes are disappointed.—Disappointments:— 1. Disappointments are the common lot of man. Prince and peasant, prophet and people, wise and unwise, rich and poor, young and old—all have suffered disappointment. Eve was disappointed in the good promised her if she ate of the tree of knowledge. The builders of Babel were disappointed. Solomon sought to find happiness in all human inventions, but had to write on them all, "Vanity!" So we might pass through the whole range of human history, from Alexander to Napoleon, and find disappointment the common lot of all. 2. The number of disappointments are incalculable. 3. The variety of disappointments which men suffer is very great. Men are disappointed in carrying out schemes of ambition, in securing preferment, in amassing and holding wealth; yes, even in carrying out plans of good, benevolence and charity. 4. The bitterness and melancholy results of these disappointments are worthy of note. Many a bright and happy life has been for ever clouded and depressed by early disappointment. Many a life has been shortened, and many another tragically ended, because of some overpowering disappointment. 5. The sources of disappointments are many. In general terms we may say they belong to a sinful world, where all is confusion, uncertain, and deranged. Disappointments arise from man's shortsightedness, mistakes, failures, and weakness. The connection of our text reads: "Without counsel purposes are disappointed." We cannot control events, or foresee contingencies that may intervene or insure the capacity, integrity, and fidelity of others. We are constantly taken by surprise at things springing up that we never dreamed of, and made no provision for. 6. The use to be made of disappointments. (1) They teach us the uncertainty of all human expectations and our absolute dependence upon God (Jas. iv. 13–15). (2) Our own impotence. (3) We are to expect disappointments. (4) When they come accept them resignedly, not stoically but look at them rationally. (5) Disappointment may sometimes be better than success. (6) There is one thing that can make all disappointments blessings. It is said that Croesus had some magic power about him by which he turned every-

thing he touched to gold. There is more than a magic power which the believer wields over the trying dispensations of life; there is a Divine power. "All things"—disappointments included—"work together for good to them that love God." (G. Hutchinson Smyth.)

Ver. 23. **A word spoken in season, how good it is!**—A word in season is a word spoken just when wanted. It is a word spoken just in the right way and manner. Such a word, how good it is! It is good because—1. It has often kept men back from a career of vice. 2. It has often instructed them under doubts and difficulties. 3. Cheered them under sorrows. 4. Weaned them from earth and pointed them to heaven. Who would not say that such a word was good? How good it is—I. IN REPROOF. II. IN COUNSEL. No one is shut out from this blessed path of usefulness. Masters and servants, even the humble, may use the talent. Naaman was healed through the wisdom of his attendants. But, like rebuke, counsel must be spoken in season. III. IN CONVERSATION. IV. IN INSTRUCTION. (*The Lay Preacher.*) *Useful speech*:—I. *USEFUL SPEECH IS A JOY-GIVING SPEECH.* "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth." Three things guarantee him joy in such speaking. 1. The testimony of his own conscience. Having spoken what he believed to be the true, the generous, and the fitting, his conscience cheers him with its smiles. 2. The manifestation of the benefit. When he sees that the men to whom he speaks are evidently being improved in knowledge, in energy, and in true nobility, he has an unspeakable joy. 3. The gratitude of his hearers. II. *USEFUL SPEECH IS A SEASONABLY-UTTERED SPEECH.* "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!" 1. It should be in season as far as the speaker's own soul is concerned. Our souls have their seasons, and words that would be suitable in one season to our souls would not be so in another. There are words suited to soul moods. 2. It should be in season as far as the hearer's soul is concerned. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 24. **The way of life is above to the wise.**—*The sublimity of true religion*:—I. **RELIGION IS ELEVATED IN PRINCIPLE.** The motive or ground of action with the sincere but truly pious is far more elevated than that which prompts the conduct of the irreligious and the merely nominal Christian. 1. It is elevated above the maxims of worldly prudence. Such prudence is really nothing more than a selfish and time-serving policy. 2. It is elevated above the standard of worldly morality. The defect of that scheme of morality which is current in the world is its utter disregard of the character of motives. II. **THE WISE ARE ELEVATED IN TASTE.** There is, in Scriptural religion, everything to purify and chasten, to elevate and refine the faculties of the mind. It gives a quickness to discern and a sensibility to feel the beauties and deformities of objects, especially those of a moral character. The dim glitter of earthly splendour has no attraction for them. They are elevated above the craving desire of human applause. III. **THE WISE ARE ELEVATED IN THEIR PURSUITS.** The worldly occupation of good men is much the same as that of other men. The way of life is above to the wise, with respect to religion itself. He seeks more after holiness than happiness. The pursuit of heaven is not any actual dereliction of the best good which this world has to afford. Its richest blessings are poured upon those who keep the world beneath their feet. Learn—1. That pure religion is vastly more elevated and holy than is generally supposed. 2. The religion of Scripture is above the conception of worldly minds. Its sublime principles are too lofty for their comprehension. (*Charles Jenkins.*) *Walking wisely*:—I. **CERTAIN CHARACTERS HERE SPOKEN OF.** "The wise." God's Word sets two characters before us—the godly and the ungodly. But there are various grades of both. The godly, or wise, are not so by natural intellect. They are the wise whom God esteems to be wise, and whom God makes wise. Though wise, they have much foolishness at times still in them; but they know the plague of their own heart. They know Christ. And they know something of the world's emptiness. II. **THE COURSE THAT THEY TAKE.** "Depart from hell beneath." God's Word says hell is a place, just as heaven is a place. Then they are wise who fear that dreadful place, and seek to depart from it, and avoid all peril of it. But the wise also take the "way of life." By this we understand the place to which they go, the way by which they go to it, and their mode of walking in it. III. **A DESCRIPTIVE CHARACTER GIVEN OF THAT COURSE.** "Above." This is applicable as well to the end of the way, which is life; and the way to it, which is Christ; and their mode of walking in it, which is by faith. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*)

Ver. 32. **He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul.**—*The folly of despising our own souls*.:—In this text the writer gives such an account of those whom he found he could do no good to as makes their folly manifest before all men. **I. THEY REFUSE INSTRUCTION.** He that neglects instruction, puts it far from him, and sets himself at a distance from it; not only because he hates it, but because he fears it. Or that strips himself of instruction; shaking off his education, as a garment he will not be hampered with. The original word has a further signification, he that will be revenged on instruction; that takes it for an affront, and studies revenge, if he be told of his faults. For instruction the margin reads “correction.” In our fallen state, that which instructs us must correct us. The corrections of Providence are intended for instruction. Many refuse discipline. They will not hear instruction, heed it, or comply with it. **II. THEY DESPISE THEIR OWN SOULS.** They evidence that they have very low and mean thoughts of their souls. But the soul is the man. He who despises his soul despises himself. There is a despising of ourselves which is commendable, and our duty—a gracious self-contempt. There is a despising of ourselves which is culpable, and of pernicious consequence. The honour of the soul is, that it is rational and immortal. They who refuse Divine instruction despise their own souls under both these considerations. Take the subject more generally, and show that it is the original error of wilful sinners, that they undervalue their own souls. 1. Who they are that despise their own souls. Some do so in opinion; who advance notions of the human soul that derogate from the honour of it; or deny their immortality. Those despise their own souls who abuse them; hazard them; neglect them; prefer their bodies before them. **III. THE FOLLY OF THOSE WHO DESPISE THEIR OWN SOULS.** 1. Consider the nature of the soul, which is too noble, too excellent, to be despised. 2. Consider the nearness of the soul. It is his own soul that the sinner despises. 3. Consider the purchase of the soul, and the price that was paid for its redemption. 4. Consider the projects that are laid about souls, and what striving there is for them, and for their love and service. 5. Consider the perpetual duration of souls, and the preparations that are made in the other world to receive them. Apply the subject: (1) Let us see and bewail our folly in having had such low thoughts of our own souls, and that we have forgotten their dignity, and put dishonour upon them. (2) Learn to put a due value upon our own souls; but to take care not to magnify ourselves above our brethren. (3) Let us make it appear that we do indeed value our own souls. (4) Let us value other things as they have relation to our souls, and fix our estimate of them by the value of our souls, and stand affected to them accordingly. Let us value our Lord Jesus Christ, as the best friend our souls ever had, who died to redeem and save them. (*Matthew Henry*.)

Ver. 33. **The fear of the Lord is the instruction of Wisdom.**—*The instruction of Wisdom* (to the young):—“Instructed” comes from the Latin *instruo*, to build up, just as a house is built up. Here Wisdom is spoken of as a person, and in the New Testament it is said, “Christ Jesus is made of God unto us Wisdom.” So it is Christ the Son of God who speaks to us in the text. He teaches the fear of the Lord. In the times of the Roman empire, there were various philosophers who had schools, but they were for grown-up people, not for the young. But these schools have long since been closed; the school of Jesus Christ, the Great Teacher, is open to-day, and you may attend it. The fear of the text is not slavish, shrinking fear, like that which the poor negroes in South America feel when the cruel overseer comes to lash them to their work. That is the way that devils fear God. To fear God means to have a solemn awe of Him, and of His holy law. But it means also, having love to Him reigning in our heart, whereby we fear to offend our heavenly Father. Slavish fear is a hindering thing, just as a strong cold wind hinders one from walking quickly and agreeably along the street; but loving fear is like the summer breezes mingling with summer sunbeams, causing all sorts of tender and beautiful things to spring up easily, and give forth their delightful fragrance. There are two ways of receiving instruction. You may get it from a fellow-creature, and yet be none the better, because stopping or resting in that; or you may get it from Jesus Christ, who is Wisdom, and then you may become wise unto salvation. 1. He will show you that sin is no trifle. 2. He will strengthen you to hate and avoid sin. You will surely find that the loving fear of the Lord is a rich, or enriching, thing; and it is also a comforting thing. (*J. Stirling Muir*.) **Godly fear and genuine humility**:—**I. GODLY FEAR.** This is godly fear, a fear of wounding the dearest object of the heart. Concerning this fear, it is here said

that it "is the instruction of Wisdom." 1. It is the great subject of Wisdom's instruction. Everywhere in nature, in the events of life, and in the holy book of God, does heavenly Wisdom inculcate this godly fear. 2. It is the great end of Wisdom's instruction. Heavenly Wisdom, in all its communications, deals with our souls not merely to enlighten the intellect and refine the tastes, but to fill us with loving fear toward God. II. GENUINE HUMILITY. "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of Wisdom; and before honour is humility." This is a maxim of very wide application. 1. It is sometimes applicable to secular exaltation. As a rule, the man who rises to affluence and power in the world has had to humble himself. He has stooped to conquer. He has condescended to drudgeries and concessions most wounding to his pride. 2. This always applies to intellectual exaltation. A most humbling sense of one's ignorance is the first step to intellectual eminence, and almost the last. 3. This invariably applies to moral exaltation. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (*Homilist.*)

CHAPTER XVI.

VER. 1. The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the Lord.—*Heart-culture* :—We must allow no habits of mind to grow upon us which shall unfit us for making the best opportunities of life when they come. We have power in ourselves, by the grace of God, to quicken the perception which shall see the opportunity when it comes, and upon ourselves rests the responsibility of keeping the resolution and the will in hand, so as to grasp the opportunity while it is within our reach. Perception is to a great degree a matter of education. The faculty of observation is improved in a child by its parent or teacher. Great study elicits from the student in ripper years a marvellous quickness and acuteness in observing. Illustrate cultured power of observation in the painter, forester, or naturalist. Same is true in the spiritual life. If your habitual practice be to refer all things to God, that devotion, that practice will give you a presence of mind in the face of every accident. A sudden sorrow may come, but you will not lose your presence of mind and readiness and accuracy of perception. Conversions that appear to be sudden, may not be so sudden as they seem to be; there may have been foregoing preparations, especially the habit of the previous life to refer all things to God with devotion. A man who has made himself unspiritual has dulled his sense of perception, and the man who has known the will of God and done it not, loses the power to rise up and follow Christ. See some ways in which the preparation of our own heart in former years makes us ready or unready to use the opportunities which God offers us. Take a man's discipline of temper, which touches a man's character very much indeed. To such a man a time of trial, disappointment, failure, comes. God thus affords the man an opportunity for the greatest and best of all the graces that can adorn humanity. It is an opportunity for true humility. The check will be a blessing to him if he has previously prepared himself by self-discipline and heart-culture. (*Canon Furse.*) *Human speech Divinely controlled* :—The sentiment, according to the A.V., is this—that it belongs to God to furnish the heart with all wisdom and grace, by which it is prepared to dictate to the tongue the utterance of whatever is truly good and profitable. Literally, the words are, "To man the orderings of the heart; but from Jehovah is the answer of the tongue." The meaning appears to be, that whatever thoughts and purposes are in a man's mind—whatever sentiments it may be his intention to utter, if they are such as are likely to have any influence, or to produce effects of any consequence—they are all under supreme control. We have an exemplification of the fact in the case of Balaam. The preparation of his mind and heart was his own. He left his country, on the invitation of Balak, with a certain purpose; designing to utter what was in harmony with his "love of the wages of unrighteousness." But the "Lord turned the curse into a blessing." He made the infatuated false prophet to feel his dependence; so that, bent as his heart was to utter one thing, his tongue was constrained to utter another. Thus it often is, in ways for which the speakers and agents themselves cannot at the time account. One of these ways is, that by imperative, unanticipated circumstances, men are brought to say the very contrary of what they intended. Something changes in a moment

the current of their thoughts and the tenor of their words. In every case there is complete Divine control. A man may revolve in his mind or heart thoughts without number, but he cannot so much as lisp or whisper one of them without God. (*Ralph Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Man proposes, God disposes*:—Taking the words as they stand before us, they give the idea that all goodness in man is from God. 1. The goodness in the heart is from Him. "The preparations of the heart in man." The margin reads "disposings." All the right disposings of the heart toward the real, the holy, and the Divine, are from the Lord. How does He dispose the heart to goodness? Not arbitrarily, not miraculously, not in any way that interferes with the free agency of man. He has avenues to the human heart of which we know nothing. (1) That He is the author of all goodness in the soul. (2) That we are bound to labour after this goodness. 2. Taking the words of the text as in our version, they teach that goodness in language is from God. "And the answer of the tongue." The language is but the expression of the heart. But the words as they stand are not true to the original. A literal translation would be this: "To man the orderings of the heart, but from Jehovah the answer of the tongue." "Man proposes, God disposes." I. THIS IS AN UNDOUBTED FACT. A fact sustained—1. By the character of God. All the plans formed in the human heart must necessarily be under the control of Him who is all-wise, and all-powerful. They cannot exist without His knowledge, they cannot advance without His permission. A fact sustained—2. By the history of men. Take for examples the purposes of Joseph's brethren, of Pharaoh in relation to Moses; of the Jews in relation to Christ, &c. A fact sustained—3. By our own experience. Who has not found the schemes of his own heart taking a direction never contemplated by the author? II. THIS IS A MOMENTOUS FACT—1. In its bearing on the enemies of God. Sinner, your most cherished schemes, whatever they may be, sensual, avaricious, infidel, are under the control of Him against whom you rebel; He will work them for your confusion, and His own glory. It is momentous—2. In its bearing on the friends of God. It is all-encouraging to them. He maketh the wrath of man to praise Him (*Psa. lxxvi. 10*). Trust in Him. (*Homilist.*) A prepared heart:—There are some of you who, at some time or other, made a great effort to be religious, and to "prepare" your own heart to feel, to pray, to be holy, to be ready to die. You strove very hard. Did you succeed? or was it a complete failure? Lay it down as a foundation-principle, the great axiom of religion—you can never "prepare" your own heart. No prayer, no effort, no strength of character, no system of theology, no quantity of good works will do it. We must always be putting back our heart into our Maker's hands with such a prayer as this: "Lord take my heart—for I cannot give it; and keep it for Thyself—for I cannot keep it for Thee." 1. God will carry on "the preparation of the heart" by discipline. It is all drill from first to last. Life is education. As soon as God has special purposes of mercy to any soul, and takes it in hand, discipline begins. 2. There is great "preparation" in God's Word. We almost imperceptibly take the mind of the author. We get an intuition into the will of God. 3. God's great instrument—if that be an instrument which is Himself—is the Holy Ghost. 4. But there is another, and, if possible, still higher stage in the great preliminary—union with the Lord Jesus Christ. Real, sensible, living union. Now, it is a great and very pleasing thought to know that this fourfold "preparation of the heart" is always going on. Now all that you have to do is to let God work, and He will work. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *The preparation of the heart the Lord's work*:—The word "preparations" is a military term, signifying the marshalling of an army. The doctrine here is, that all our fitness for duty, and all our assistance in it, is from the Lord. I. HOW DOETH GOD PREPARE THE HEART FOR DUTY? Preparation is twofold—that which divines call habitual, and also actual preparation for particular occasions of duty. That which is habitual respects our state; that which is actual represents our frames. God assists us—1. By calling off our vain and wandering thoughts, and so fixing our hearts for duty. 2. He works in our heart a holy fear and reverence of His majesty. 3. By giving us the savour of past experiences, and by giving us present desires, after communing with Him. 4. By sudden and unexpected enlargement of spirit. We are surprised into mercy. II. HOW DOETH GOD PREPARE US IN OUR SPEECHES BEFORE HIM? 1. He reveals to us our own wants, gives us some special errand to go with to God. 2. He gives us arguments and pleas to use in prayer. 3. He makes intercessions in us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 4. He guides and directs the soul to ask but for those things which God means to give. Use: If men cannot prepare them-

selves for duty, after grace is received, much less can they prepare themselves for grace while in an unregenerate state. Caution against three things. (1) Known omissions. (2) Conscience-wasting sins. (3) Dependence on gifts, in your approach to God. (*John Hill.*)

Ver. 2. All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes.—False judgments:—

The best causers have decided the point that a good intention cannot sanctify an immoral act; but it is certain that an indirect or evil intention will sully the best performances. Here is indicated the false judgment of man. All his ways are censured by intimation: the best of them are not truly right and genuine, if we should refer them to the judgment of God. One would think he were secure, if his heart stand but right; but alas! by degrees it will be corrupted and brought into the deception. It often deceives the owner himself in the estimate of his ways. To walk wisely, which means, to walk virtuously and religiously, we must have a truer measure than the partial complacency of our own hearts. Let us examine our ways—1. In respect to our sins. Sin hath been so great a familiar in our conversations, that in some degree it hath got our approbation, or at least our favourable connivance. We can, by habit, appease and quiet conscience. What we tremble at in our youth, by custom and usage we are more hardy in. Some sins committed long ago are forgotten by us, or have lessened in our sentiments of their guilt. Difference in quality, and the several ways of men's living, varies their sentiments of some sins. We often bear a civility and preference to some sins above others, and think ourselves all the while very clean. Our tempers and constitutions sometimes are of that happy frame as to have a natural aversion to some sins; but that cleanliness is not thankworthy if we can more glibly swallow down those that are more palatable. Partiality towards our sins is a most notorious deceitfulness. To retain some as favourites is a certain corruption in the government of ourselves. A sin that lies brooding in the thoughts and cannot come out into act for want of opportunity, or dare not venture out for fear of shame or present punishment, is notwithstanding a great uncleanness. A habit or course of lesser evils, or neglects, amounts to greater guilt than one single lapse or fall, though into some great transgression. Yet we are apt to pass over the habitual uncleanness. 2. A more refined degree of purity and cleanliness we assume to ourselves, from that little practice of religion we carry on, and much depend upon. Bare believing and professing goes a long way. In our devotions we may confide in our addresses to God in prayer. We had best be careful in this matter, lest our very prayers rise up in judgment against us. Searchingly estimate our charity. Take the duty of repentance. We deceive ourselves when we have only cast ourselves into the figure of a penitent, and appeared so in our face, our speech, our gesture. Or we may lay great stress on our frequent confessions. Or may put a greater weight of humiliation upon some sins that have galled us than upon others that, though more heinous, have sat more easy upon us. The dilatory ways we have of putting off this duty of repentance is a slighting negligence. (*J. Cooke, M.A.*)

What I think of myself and what God thinks of me:—“All the ways of a man”—then is there no such thing as being conscious of having gone wrong? Of course there is, and equally of course a broad statement such as this of my text is not to be pressed into literal accuracy, but is a simple general assertion of what we all know to be true, that we have a strange power of blinding ourselves as to what is wrong in ourselves and in our actions. But what is it that God weighs? “The spirits.” We too often content ourselves with looking at our ways; God looks at ourselves. He takes the inner man into account, estimates actions by motives, and so very often differs from our judgment of ourselves, and of one another. I. OUR STRANGE POWER OF BLINDING OURSELVES. “All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes.” 1. For, to begin with, we all know that there is nothing that we so habitually neglect as the bringing of conscience to bear right through all our lives. Sometimes it is because there is a temptation that appeals very strongly to some strong inclination which has been strengthened by indulgence. And when the craving arises, that is no time to begin asking, “Is it right or is it wrong to yield?” That question stands small chance of being wisely considered at a moment when, under the goading of roused desire, a man is like a mad bull when it charges. It drops its head and shuts its eyes, and goes right forward, and no matter whether it smashes its horns against an iron gate, and damages them and itself, or not, on it will go. But in regard to the smaller commonplace matters of daily life, too, we all know that there are whole regions of our lives which seem to us to be so small

that it is hardly worth while summoning the august thought of "right or wrong?" to decide them. It is the trifles of life that shape life, and it is to them that we so frequently fail in applying, honestly and rigidly, the test, "Is this right or wrong?" Get the habit of bringing conscience to bear on little things, or you will never be able to bring it to bear when great temptations come and the crises emerge in your lives. Thus, by reason of that deficiency in the habitual application of conscience to our lives, we slide through, and take for granted that all our ways are right in our eyes. 2. Then there is another thing: we not only neglect the rigid application of conscience to all our lives, but we have a double standard, and the notion of right and wrong which we apply to our neighbours is very different from that which we apply to ourselves. "All the ways of a man are right in his own eyes," but the very same "ways" that you allow to pass muster and condone in yourselves, you visit with sharp and unfailing censure in others. 3. Then there is another thing to be remembered, and that is—the enormous and the tragical influence of habit in dulling the mirror of our souls, on which our deeds are reflected in their true image. What we are accustomed to do we scarcely ever recognise to be wrong, and it is these things which pass because they are habitual that do more to wreck lives than occasional outbursts of far worse evils, according to the world's estimate of them. Habit dulls the eye. 4. Yes; and more than that, the conscience needs educating just as much as any other faculty. A man says, "My conscience acquits me"; then the question is, "And what sort of a conscience have you got, if it acquits you?" "I thought within myself that I verily ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." "They think that they do God service." Many things that seem to us virtues are vices. And as for the individual so for the community. The perception of what is right and what is wrong needs long educating. When I was a boy the whole Christian Church of America, with one voice, declared that "slavery was a patriarchal institution appointed by God." II. THE DIVINE ESTIMATE. I have already pointed out the two emphatic thoughts that lie in that clause, "God weigheth," and "weigheth the spirits." "God weighs the spirits." He reads what we do by His knowledge of what we are. We reveal to one another what we are by what we do, and, as is a commonplace, none of us can penetrate, except very superficially and often inaccurately, to the motives that actuate. III. THE PRACTICAL ISSUES OF THESE THOUGHTS. "Commit thy works unto the Lord"—that is to say, do not be too sure that you are right because you do not think you are wrong. We should be very distrustful of our own judgment of ourselves, especially when that judgment permits us to do certain things. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in the things which he alloweth." You may have made the glove too easy by stretching. Then, again, let us seek the Divine strengthening and illumination. Seek it by prayer. There is nothing so powerful in stripping off from our besetting sins their disguises and masks as to go to God with the honest petition: "Search me . . . and try me," &c. We ought to keep ourselves in very close union with Jesus Christ, because if we cling to Him in simple faith, He will come into our hearts, and we shall be saved from walking in darkness, and have the light of life shining down upon our deeds. Christ is the conscience of the Christian man's conscience. We must punctiliously obey every dictate that speaks in our own consciences, especially when it urges us to unwelcome duties, or restrains us from too welcome sins. "To him that hath shall be given." (A. Maclaren, D.D.) *Unsound spiritual trading*:—Unrecorded in the journals, and unmourned by unregenerate men, there are failures, and frauds, and bankruptcies of soul. Speculation is a spiritual vice as well as a commercial one—trading without capital is common in the religious world, and puffery and deception are every-day practices. The outer world is always the representative of the inner. I. THE WAYS OF THE OPENLY WICKED. Can it be that these people are right in their own eyes? They who are best acquainted with mankind will tell you that self-righteousness is not the peculiar sin of the virtuous, but that it flourishes best where there appears to be the least soil for it. The worst of men conceive that they have some excellences and virtues which, if they do not quite atone for their faults, yet at any rate greatly diminish the measure of blame which should be awarded them. II. THE WAYS OF THE GODLESS MAN. This man is often exceedingly upright and moral in his outward behaviour to his fellow-men. He has no religion, but he glories in a multitude of virtues of another kind. Many who have much that is amiable about them are nevertheless unamiable and unjust towards the one Being who ought to have the most of their love. III. THE WAYS OF THE OUTWARDLY RELIGIOUS. IV. THE WAYS OF

THE COVETOUS PROFESSOR. V. THE WAYS OF THE WORLDLY PROFESSOR. VI. THE WAYS OF SECURE BACKSLIDERS. VII. THE WAYS OF THE DECEIVED MAN. There are many who will never find out that their ways, which they thought to be so clean, are all foul, until they enter upon another world. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) But the Lord weigheth the spirits.—*God's omniscience*:—Weighing and pondering denote the nicest exactness we can express. Argue the text—I. FROM THE LIGHT OF NATURAL REASON. We cannot have any rational idea of a God unless we attribute to Him the perfection of infinite knowledge. His power cannot be almighty if none be allowed Him to descend into our minds, and inspect our thoughts and imaginations. God's immensity and omnipresence must admit Him into the hidden corners of our souls. The infinity of His justice and goodness will be brought into question, unless He be acknowledged to search the hearts of men. He must be able to judge the aggravations and extenuations of all that is evil. II. FROM THE LIGHT OF REVELATION. The tenor of all the laws of God through the Scriptures doth sufficiently confirm the truth of this doctrine, because no manner of obedience can be accepted with Him, but what must proceed from the integrity and sincerity of the heart, of which He alone can make the discovery. And there are likewise many express declarations of this high prerogative to rouse our consideration, and strike terror into our souls. The wisest heathen and philosophers have maintained that the prime and chiefest intimation and communication the Deity hath with men is with their hearts, and that the most acceptable service and devotion must therefore come from thence. (*J. Cooke, M.A.*) *Self-complacency and omniscience*:—I. THE SELF-COMPLACENCY OF SINNERS. "All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes." Saul of Tarsus is a striking example of this. He once rejoiced in virtues which he never had. Indeed all sinners think well of their own conduct. Why is this? 1. He views himself in the light of society. He judges himself by the character of others. 2. He is ignorant of the spirituality of God's law. 3. His conscience is in a state of dormancy. The eye of his conscience is not open to see the enormity of his sin. II. THE SEARCHING OMNISCIENCE OF GOD. "The Lord weigheth the spirits." This implies—1. The essence of the character is in the spirit. The sin of an action is not in the outward performance, but in the motive. 2. This urges the duty of self-examination. "If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Misled by false principles of conscience*:—We never do evil so thoroughly and cordially as when we are led to it by a false principle of conscience. (*J. Pascal.*) *Exact balances*:—In the reign of King Charles I. the goldsmiths of London had a custom of weighing several sorts of their precious metals before the Privy Council. On this occasion they made use of scales poised with such exquisite nicety that the beam would turn, the master of the Company affirmed, at the two hundredth part of a grain. Nay, the famous Attorney-General replied, "I shall be loth, then, to have all my actions weighed in these scales." "With whom I heartily concur," says the pious Hervey, "in relation to myself; and since the balances of the sanctuary, the balances in God's hand, are infinitely exact, oh! what need have we of the merit and righteousness of Christ, to make us acceptable in His sight, and passable in His esteem!"

Ver. 3. Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.—*Doing our duty is committing our way to God*:—There is no intrinsic value in things. They only possess a relative value. All things depend upon seasonableness. The Scripture speaks of a "word in season." If there can be words in season, there can be words out of season. A word not in season is merely a right thing in a wrong place. Therefore it is not the value of the thing in itself; there is no such thing; values are all from without. The idlest dream a man has is that a bit of gold has an intrinsic value. But a thing that is worthless to-day is not therefore worthless at another time. The word for to-day, in this text, is one of rest. Many people say that "committing your ways to the Lord," is to tell them to Him when you pray. But that is only saying something. A large part of the piety of the people consists in saying feelings instead of doing. When we say "Commit thy works unto Him," it is with a view to put down fret, fever, and distress, and to learn a lesson of the holiday of the soul, rather than of the work-day and mammon. Committing your burden unto the Lord is getting Him to carry it. It does not mean sit still and do no work. There is always something left for man to do, even when God takes the matters up. "Commit thy ways" must mean something in the spirit by which, while a man goes on in life, he gets the fret, and the burden,

and the gall, and the weariness off his shoulders. There are two difficult and painful businesses. One is, to fit your circumstances to yourself; and the other is, to fit yourself to your circumstances. Ambition is seldom desirable. A profound sense of duty will do all that ambition can do, and leave nothing of the bitterness behind. Suit thyself to thy circumstances; do thy duty; and so commit thy way unto the Lord. Committing your ways is just the absence of ambition: it is to do thy work, and leave it to the great laws of God. He commits his ways unto the Lord who does his duty simply in the state in which he is. As to the results. The text notes the establishment of the thoughts—not always the success of the work—but the establishment of the man. Quietness—uprightness—"Slow gains and few shames." Commit thyself, with all thy way, and work, and soul, to Him. Say thy prayers, confess thy sins, do thy little piece of work, and do it honestly; God will redeem thee, atone for thee, regenerate thee, be the guardian of thy tomb, fashion for thee a new body, weave for thee an eternal dress, and provide for thee "a house not made with hands." Think of the blessed result. Be at rest in the Lord, wait patiently for Him; He shall establish thy thought; He shall save thy soul; He shall crown thee with eternal peace. (*George Dawson, M.A.*) *Works and thoughts*:—I. THE PRECEPT OR COUNSEL. 1. The object, or thing itself, which is committed: "our works." Either the works done by us, or the works done to, or upon us. Our affairs and businesses. Whatever action we go about, we are to commit ourselves to the Lord, and to refer ourselves still to Him for the disposing of it. We are to commit our works to the Lord in regard to our performance of them; to the acceptance of them; and to their success. Our conditions; those things which in any way concern us, we are also to commit unto the Lord. 2. The act: "committing." In a way of simple commendation: presenting them, and laying them open before Him. This is required in order that God may direct and assist us; and also as a piece of respect to God Himself. In a way of humble resignation. Implying that we have some sense of the difficulty and burdensomeness of those works that are upon us. This is necessary, that we may labour the more for strength and ability to the discharge of them; that we may be the more humbled for our failings and neglects in it, as coming short of that exactness and perfection that was required of us; and in reference to others, in a way of compassion; to pity those in the same condition: in a way of assistance, and concurrence with them, for easing their burden; and in a way of thankfulness and acceptance, by acknowledging that labour and pains which hath been taken by them. Committing our works to God must not be taken as allowing us to omit the doing of them. In a way of faithful improvement. Order, dispose, and direct all thine actions unto Him. Roll our works to Him as we would roll a bowl to the mark. Make Him the scope and end and aim of all our endeavours. In a way of thankful acknowledgment. 3. The person to whom the deposition is committed. Consider His wisdom and knowledge; His strength and power; His faithfulness and truth; His willingness to undertake our burden. We are to commit our burden to Him, and to no one else: to the Lord, not to self; not to other men; not to fortune or chance. II. THE PROMISE, OR ARGUMENT TO ENFORCE IT. Something implied in this sentence: "thy thoughts shall be established." Where there are works there will be thoughts. Our chiefest business is composing and settling our minds. Establishing of our thoughts is a very great happiness and mercy. Something expressed. Thou shalt have a mind free from any other trouble and distraction when thou hast practised this counsel in the text. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Dependence on God*:—The counsel implies—1. That all our purposes and all our doings should be according to God's will. 2. That none of our works can prosper without God. 3. That it is therefore the imperative duty of intelligent creatures to own their independence, and to seek, on all occasions, the Divine countenance and blessing. 4. That what is our duty is, at the same time, our interest. 5. A general truth is expressed, that God will graciously smile on the efforts, and accomplish the purposes and wishes of him who, in all that he does, piously and humbly acknowledges Him and seeks His blessing. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. The Lord hath made all things for Himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.—Of God's disposing all things to their proper ends:—No light on this passage comes from the context. The words may be taken—I. IN THE SENSE THAT GOD CREATED ALL THINGS MERELY FOR HIS OWN GOOD PLEASURE, WITHOUT ANY EXTERNAL MOTIVE. Then the latter part of the verse contains a great difficulty—how can God be said to have made the wicked for Himself, for the manifesting of

His glory in the day of punishment? It is impossible that God could have any external motive, when in the universe there was nothing existing without Himself. The good pleasure of God is the only reason why things were brought into being at all. God has declared Himself by a clear revelation to persons of all capacities to be the Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things that are therein. His goodness moved Him to bring creatures into being on which He might display that goodness, and to whom He might communicate His happiness. The glory of God is not anything properly relating to Himself, any advantage or benefit to Him; it is the communicating of His goodness, by creating the world; the promoting His likeness among rational creatures, by the practice of righteousness. But how can God be said to have made even the wicked for Himself? Some have contended that God has on purpose made many creatures necessarily inclined to wickedness, that He might manifest His power and authority in their destruction. But nothing can be more blasphemous than to imagine that He created any beings with design that they might be wicked and miserable. Nevertheless, because it is certain that nothing comes to pass without His permission, nothing subsists but by His power and concurrence, nothing is done but by the use or abuse of those faculties which He has created, therefore in Scripture phrase, and in acknowledgment of the supreme superintendence of providence over all events, God is represented as doing everything that is done in the world. II. CONSIDER THE TEXT AS MEANING, THE LORD HAS MADE ALL THINGS SUITED TO EACH OTHER: YEA, EVEN THE WICKED TO THE DAY OF EVIL. This is the more natural sense. The only question that arises is, How can God be said to have fitted the wicked to destruction? In the Jewish language all that is meant is, that God causes wickedness and punishment to be proportionable. It is only an instance of the wisdom and exact adjustment of the works of God. The adjustment of men's condition to their deserts is the true greatness and glory of a kingdom. It is the natural tendency of things to get conditions fitted to deserts; and God takes care, by the positive interposition of His power and authority in the world, that every evil work shall have its proper recompense in the day of evil. 1. We may justify God, and give glory to Him in all His proceedings. 2. If we would escape the day of evil, we must avoid the wickedness to which it is annexed. (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) *Wicked men, the providential instruments of good:—* All things are in God's hands, and He makes use of all things as He pleases; for He created them all. However the wicked may be set upon mischief, they can proceed no further than God permits; being instruments only in His hand, to afflict others; to exercise good men with trials, or to punish the wicked. All kinds of calamities and disasters that may befall mankind may therefore be ascribed to God as the supreme arbitrator, and disposer of all events. Mankind were very apt to suspect that there were two opposite powers in the world, one the fountain of good, and the other the fountain of mischief. Scripture teaches that both good and evil, both prosperity and adversity, proceed from the same fountain, and are both to be ascribed to one and the same God. God serves Himself of angels and men as His instruments, and permits them to act no further than He can turn to good. I. OPEN AND ILLUSTRATE THE GENERAL DOCTRINE. The Lord orders and disposes all things so as one way or other to serve His own wise purposes. Whatever second causes there are, or however they act, still it is God, and God alone, that governs the world. Events that seem merely casual and accidental are in reality providential. The most mysterious part of God's government of the moral world is His ordering even the wicked in a way consistent with human liberty, and so as to serve the ends of His providence, and to promote His glory. The fact is certain, the manner how is beyond our comprehension. This we can see, it was kind and gracious in God to create men, though He knew that many of them would prove wicked. And God makes use of the wicked men, who are His creatures, to serve the ends of His providence. They mean nothing but evil, while God turns it to good. Consider the power of God over the minds and hearts of wicked men. But does not God's making use of the sins of men look like concurring with, and countenancing their iniquities? Men commit the sins, God does but control, curb, and regulate. II. THE PRACTICAL USE AND IMPROVEMENT OF THIS DOCTRINE. 1. It is both our duty and interest to submit all our concerns to Him, upon whom all success, and every blessing, depend. A question may arise as to the use of means, and the necessity or serviceableness of human care or industry. But miracles are not to be expected in the ordinary course of affairs. Success in affairs is proposed by God as the reward consequent upon proper care and application. 2. God controls and bridles wicked men in all their machinations. Therefore we need

never be afraid of wicked men, or of devils. Wicked men, however malicious or mischievous, are weak in themselves. They are held in as with bit and bridle. 3. Refer all the hard usage, all the injuries or troubles we meet with from men, to God, the real author of them. 4. Learn to estimate aright the ordinary stream of affairs, the common course of this world. It may be very bad: it is being over-ruled. 5. Fix in the mind an assurance of the constant working of Divine Providence. (*D. Waterland, D.D.*) *God made all things for Himself*:—Scholars render this verse, “The Lord hath made everything for its purpose.” The meaning of which is, that eventually the use and condition of every person and thing in the universe will be found to correspond with its character. But the form given in the authorised version sets forth a sublime and indubitable truth. How can we gain right views of the infinite majesty of God? God Himself aids us, inwardly, by His Spirit quickening our moral powers, and outwardly, by the means of light and instruction which He has put within our reach—the books of nature and of providence, and His inspired Word. Duly considered, our text may help us to find our proper place in the great system of things, and to see and realise our being’s true end and aim. What was God’s purpose in giving being to this universe? The answer of Scripture is that God made not only us but all things for Himself. Look at the necessity of the case. How else could it be? The whole universe must have one great object. All things now existing, save God, once did not exist. Everything was wrapped up in the bosom of God. His purpose embraced the creation of the universe. His purpose must have been derived from Himself, and have centred in Himself. When God spake the creative word, it was of and for Himself. There was no other conceivable source or object. When He made all things for Himself, and the promotion of His glory, He acted under a necessity of His nature as the infinitely perfect God. No doubt God willed the happiness of the creatures whom He made; but back of this, He purposed to promote His own glory. 1. Apprehending this is designed to teach us a lesson in self-knowledge. What we are as creatures we can never know as we ought, save by studying the Uncreated. It is in the contemplation of the nature, purposes, and works of God, that we can best see the insignificance of man. We should be humbled not merely as beings, but much more as moral beings. The greatness of God fearfully enhances the guilt of man. 2. The doctrine we are considering inculcates a lesson in active duty, as well as self-knowledge and humility. It urges a plea for God’s service, before which every pretext for disobedience must be hushed. Did God make all things for Himself? There can be no higher reason for obeying Him, and to disobey Him is made thereby infinitely irrational, impious, and vain. The fact that God seeks His own glory in all things should not only determine the form of our duty, but also be its motive and its end. To give this prominence to God’s glory clashes with no real interest of man, and does no violence to any original principle of His nature; on the contrary, in aiming at it, man is aiming at his greatest good. Why should not the infinite and perfect God be capable of engrossing and satisfying the whole mind and heart of His creature man? The frame of mind is not indeed natural to man, and it cannot be attained in the independent exercise of his natural powers. It is only by God’s Spirit that he can be made thus spiritual. Only by looking to Jesus in a simple, earnest, exclusive, and habitual faith, can any one learn to make God and His glory the end of his being. (*W. Sparrow, D.D.*) *The universal sovereignty of God*:—The word “made” is not here “created,” but it is used in the more general sense of “do,” “work,” “perform.” The Lord Jehovah hath wrought, performed, all things for Himself. The final end of all Divine proceeding is God’s own glory. This hidden and ultimate purpose of all the works of God is revealed in the text. 1. The Lord hath made all things for Himself in creation. And man is part of His creation. 2. The principle of the text applies to the work of redemption. It is of God’s sovereign will and pleasure, and for His own eternal glory, that God hath been pleased to choose a Church out of this fallen world, to be glorified in His Son, Jesus Christ. This view of redemption tends to humble the sinner. 3. God hath made all things for Himself in providence. Every event or circumstance in this world’s history has been arranged or ordered for the glory of Jehovah. It is impossible that anything shall ever happen which shall not tend directly or indirectly to this great end. Sin is essentially the fault of the creature. God is not the author of evil. The wicked were not created as such. They are, however, appointed unto the day of evil as their fitting punishment. (*W. E. Light, M.A.*) *The Lord hath made all things for Himself*:—Here attention is directed to God, to His general

formation of all things, and to the arrangements which, in that creation, He has unquestionably made. God is the universal Creator. Yet philosophers, ancient and modern, have always been trying to find another maker of things than God. Wherever there is existence, there the hand of God has been put forth in conferring that existence. God has made everything just as a Being absolutely perfect ought to make it. Though God made man upright, He did not make man a sinner. Man has made himself a sinner. God made all things for Himself. He is the origin, and He is the end. There are, indeed, subordinate ends, but they lose themselves, as it were, in God, the great end of all. In saying that the Lord "made the wicked for the day of evil," we must recur to His foresight. He allows some sinners to go on in their guilt till death finds them ready for eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord; and therefore, at every stage in which these wicked ones may be contemplated, they are still to be considered as the works of God, supported by Him, provided for by Him. The day of evil looks to the final retribution of all things. We are to ascribe to God the existence, the support, the maintenance, of those individuals who are rising up every moment in rebellion against Him. The wicked are as much in the hands of God to be punished by Him as the good are in His hands to receive undeserved kindness. (*James Maclean, D.D.*)

Ver. 5. Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord.—On pride :—In the maladies which assault the human body, a marked distinction prevails as to the relative extensiveness of their influence. A kindred analogy discriminates the distempers of the mind. Pride claims the denomination of an universal passion. Age, or sex, or situation exempts not from its control. Body and mind, virtues and vices, it presses into its service. Men are proud in health, proud in the chamber of disease; proud in public, proud in retirement; proud of their frugality, proud of their profusion; proud of their sobriety, proud of their intemperance; proud of their pride, proud of their humility. I. **SOME OF ITS MODES OF OPERATION.** 1. **National pride.** Different regions are separated by appropriate marks of moral discrimination. One will be described as courageous; one as interested; one as fickle, one as circumspect. But you will hear each characterised as proud. Pride sometimes wears the features of emulation; sometimes of ambition; sometimes of resentment; sometimes of policy. How generally in the senate and in the private circles, no less than on the parade and in the camp, is national pride, under various forms, addressed, applauded, pushed forward to additional excesses! 2. **Pride in the walks of private life.** The man who is intoxicated by pride of birth; the pride of authority. The exercise of power affords to pride the most solid gratification. The pride of wealth. What solicitude is devoted to the establishment of a name for opulence! Besides the pride of accumulation and possession, there is the pride of displaying riches. The pride of genius, intellect, and talents. Under how many different shapes is it exhibited! Sometimes in disdain of industry, as indicative of dulness; sometimes in the love of singularity and paradox; sometimes in proneness to stigmatise received opinions as vulgar prejudices, or in sceptical repugnance to acquiesce in any truth not completely circumscribed within the span of human comprehension. Sometimes it betrays itself by overweening ideas which the individual ill disguises of the extent of his own powers, and by his unbounded estimation of their importance; sometimes by open scorn of ordinary men, and of the sobriety of common sense; sometimes by unwarranted daringness of enterprise, and presumptuous confidence of success; sometimes it is displayed in impatience of contradiction, in oracular sententiousness, in a dictatorial delivery of opinion. The pride of literary and professional attainments. The pride of fashion. Above all, the man of spiritual pride. II. **THE IRRECONCILABLE CONTRARIETY BETWEEN PRIDE AND RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLE.** The corner-stone of Christian virtue is humility. The most powerful obstacle to the conversion of the Jews was pride. The primary source of modern unbelief is pride. Pride, which refuses to do homage to the wisdom of revelation, and bow the neck to the yoke of the gospel. The cold and careless scorner resists the influence of the gospel far more effectually than the open sinner. III. **GOD'S SPECIAL JUDGMENTS AGAINST PRIDE.** He chastises nations by bringing upon them national calamities. In Scripture we find it is this sin that has drawn down the most severe judgments on individuals, such as Nebuchadnezzar, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Ahithophel, Herod (see also the Laodiceans). Is not pride convicted as in every shape utterly un-Christian, as the primary cause of the fall of man, as in all ages the

foundation of most heinous sins, of the most tremendous judgments? Then leave pride to the proud. Be not ye corrupted to call evil good, and darkness light. Pride is ever setting itself up against heaven. When it looks to God, it is with a desire of being freed from dependence on Him. When it considers men, it undervalues His gifts to others; and prompts us to act, with respect to His gifts to ourselves, as though they were inherent in us, or were our due. Scrutinise your own bosom that you may discover whether it is under the influence of pride. (*Thos. Gisborne, M.A.*)

Ver. 6. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.—*The mission of mercy and truth* :—Some plead for prevailing mercy, and some for prevailing justice, in jurisprudence, education, and theology. Some try to blend the two, but find the effort a hopeless one. By a mercy and truth torn apart, and set in opposition to each other, iniquity is not purged. Solomon was speaking in the spirit of the Old Testament; yet he has no sense of contradiction between these two qualities: he makes no endeavour to show how they may be adjusted to each other. He does not say that truth is tempered with mercy, or that mercy must not be carried too far lest it should interfere with truth. He says simply, “By mercy and truth iniquity is purged.” Both are equally enemies of iniquity; both are equally interested in its extirpation; both are equally interested in the deliverance of the creature who is tormented by it. This view alone could satisfy the Jew who believed in the God of Abraham. The Lord of heaven had revealed himself to his fathers as the God of righteousness and truth. The Jews were tempted to honour beings less righteous; and they yielded to the temptation. But the Being whom they forgot was what He had ever been. His mercy and truth were fixed as the hills. By and by the recollection of Him came back to them. It was their comfort to believe there was One unlike themselves, One who was not changeable and capricious as they were. He was merciful, and forgave their transgressions. This unfolded to them depths in the Divine character of which they had known nothing, or only by the hearing of the ear. They felt that only a perfectly righteous Being could be perfectly merciful. The psalmists implore mercy, but they implore it of One who, they believe, is willing to bestow it, because He is righteous. That view of mercy, in which it takes the form of indulgence of sins, they dare not cherish. The fear of God is the fear of the righteous and merciful Lord; not the fear of some false being, some creature of their own thoughts, clothed with their own evil qualities. Such creatures they were not to fear; they were to fight continually against the fear of them. In the Son of God did any one see that warfare of truth with mercy which we have so rashly dreamed of in the eternal mind? His warfare was the warfare of truth and mercy against untruth and hardness of heart. Jesus showed that mercy and truth were divided only by the evil which seeks to destroy both. It is by their perfect union that iniquity is purged. The sacrifice of Christ purges iniquity. But we are not taught in the Bible that the sacrifice of Christ was the sacrifice to one attribute, for the sake of bringing it into agreement with another. By the mercy and truth of God the Father, Son, and Spirit is the iniquity of our race, and of each of its members, purged. By the fear of this great and holy name do men depart from evil. The fear of an unbending Lawgiver will not keep men from evil. The New Testament name for God is the name of absolute eternal Truth and Love, and this alone makes us fear to sin. (*F. D. Maurice, M.A.*) **By the fear of the Lord men depart from evil.**—*Sins of men arising from a want of the fear of God, and the instigation of the devil* :—The wickedness of man is referable to two causes, a want of due apprehension of the Almighty, and the instigation of the devil. Consider who God is, and what are His chief qualities. He is the creator and governor of the universe: a Being of infinite power, present everywhere, privy to our most secret transactions. If we had these ideas constantly before our eyes, should we ever dare affront Him with our iniquities? There is a particular scepticism in too many, with regard to the attributes of God. They doubt whether He possesses some qualities in that extent in which reason and Scripture assure us that He doth. They persuade themselves that His presence is not universal; that He does not regard human concerns minutely; that He is not too rigidly just; and that His goodness will tone His justice. But if they did not wish to deceive themselves, they would never reason in this manner. Nor may we impute our iniquities to our natural frailty, seeing we are promised aids in overcoming it. The want of the fear of God is the prime cause of unrighteousness. The enemy only attacks us when he perceives us defenceless; then he plies us with suitable temptations. Our

safety from him lies in keeping, continually, well within the fear of the Lord. (*G. Haggitt, M.A.*) *The fear of God*:—The term “fear” is here used for the principle of religion. This principle is the only one which will cause men to forsake evil. A reverent regard to the Divine will is the only security for human virtue. Fear, then, here embraces all the feelings and motives, which tend to keep men separate from everything which God disapproves. Dread of the Divine displeasure prepares the soul for the operation of higher and better feelings. There are those who are disposed to censure the text, as conveying an expression positively wrong. Reason is the power which persons of this stamp profess to worship; and reason, as well as religion, has in all ages, had her bigots and fanatics. The fear of the Lord they spurn, as a motive infinitely beneath them. All fear, they tell us, is sordid and slavish. They say that all virtue is to be despaired of which is not built on disinterested feeling, *i.e.*, on a complete independence either of punishment or reward. But if we take away the fear of God, what safeguard have we left for the integrity of man? True, man has two guides, his moral sense, or perception of right and wrong, and his sense of what is useful and expedient. But would the virtue of individuals or the peace of society be long secured in the custody of these sages? 1. We must not speak in disparagement of the moral sense. But it is the fact, that the breath of a corrupt world has passed over this breastplate of light and perfection, and hath dimmed its glory. This faculty has deeply partaken of man’s degeneracy. The sense of moral fitness often degenerates into a mere taste or impulse. The advantages this world has to offer are not clearly on the side of virtue. Were virtue to be found at perpetual variance with pleasure or with safety, it is absurd to imagine that she would long retain her votaries. 2. Will man’s sense of what is useful for the general good of mankind do any more for him than the sense of moral propriety. Suppose each member of a commonwealth were under an implied covenant with his fellow-men to abstain from actions which may be at variance with the general interest. What is there to secure this compact from daily and hourly violation, when there is no witness to report it, and no external power to control it. Who but the man himself is to interpret the rules of universal convenience and expediency in cases where doubt really exists, or where selfishness raises the apparition of a doubt? Here, then, we have a law left to execute itself. Suppose human laws come to aid the powers within us; it may still be urged that these are not effective if the powers of the world to come be removed. No law can long maintain its authority without reference to the Supreme Will, the fountain of all law throughout the universe. Equally rash would it be to rely on the fear of infamy to prevent disorder and crime. For here again the hope of escaping discovery would come in to pacify the apprehensions of disgrace. It is public opinion that yields this scourge, and it is the general prevalence of high moral feeling that makes public opinion a stern and formidable executioner. The moral sense, and the rule of public usefulness, furnish, no doubt, very strong recommendations to virtuous practice, but nothing less than the fear of an avenging Deity can ever generally enforce it. (*C. W. Le Bas, M.A.*) *Mercy and truth evidential of salvation*:—The application might be restricted to the manner in which the God of mercy and truth, the God who Himself “delighteth in mercy,” and who “requireth truth in the inward parts,” manifests His regard to the practice of these virtues in His creatures. There is a Scriptural sense, too, in which mercy and truth, and the kindred graces, impart confidence towards God; but it is only as evidential of interest in the salvation by grace which the Divine Word reveals; it is neither as meritorious, nor as expiatory. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.—*Our ways*:—These words contain two blessed fruits of a gracious conversation. The one more immediate and direct, acceptance with God; the other more remote, and by consequence from the former, peace with men. **I. THE SUBJECT.** “A man’s ways.” His whole carriage in the course of his life, with all his thoughts, speeches, and actions, good or bad. When a man walketh in the beaten track of the world, without ever turning his feet unto God’s testimonies, neither that man nor his ways can please the Lord. When a man walketh conscionably and constantly in the good ways of God both the man and his ways are well pleasing unto God. When a man in the more constant course of his life walketh uprightly, and in a right way, but yet in a few particulars treadeth awry, the man may be accepted, though his ways are not altogether pleasing.

II. THE ACT. "Pleasing." This hath reference to acceptation: wherein the endeavour is one thing, and the event another. A man may have a full intention, and make due endeavour, and yet fail of his end. This is apparent when we have to deal with men. To please signifieth rather the event in finding acceptance than the endeavour in seeking it. In a moral sense, however, not so much the event as the endeavour and intention. But there may be a good assurance of the event where the desire of pleasing is unfeigned and the endeavour faithful. III. THE OBJECT. All men strive to please; but some to please themselves; some to please other men; and some to please the Lord. We should endeavour so to walk as to please God. For He is our Master, Captain, Father, and King. There is one great benefit attached to pleasing the Lord in the text—"He will make our enemies to be at peace with us." We may add, He will preserve us from sinful temptations. He will answer our prayers. He will translate us into His heavenly kingdom. The wicked man, who displeases God, strengthens the hands of his enemies; exposes himself as a prey to temptations; blocks up the passage against his own prayer; debars himself from entering the kingdom. How can pleasing the Lord be done? By likeness and obedience. The godly love what God loveth. They desire and endeavour to be holy as He is holy; perfect as He is perfect, merciful as the heavenly Father is merciful. Obedience is the proof of our willing and cheerful subjection to His most righteous commands. It is vain to think of pleasing God by the mere outward performances of fasting, prayer, almsdeeds, hearing God's Word, or receiving the Sacrament. How comes it about that such poor things as our best endeavours are should please God? Our good works are pleasing to God upon two grounds. 1. Because He worketh them in us; and—2. Because He looketh upon us and them in Christ. In the consequent of pleasing God there are three things observable. The persons—a man's enemies. The effect—peace. The author—the Lord. The scope of the whole words is to instruct us that the fairest and likeliest way for us to procure peace with man is to order our ways so as to please the Lord. The favour of God and the favour of men is joined together in Holy Scripture, as if the one were a consequent of the other. (*Bp. Sanderson.*) *The true way of pleasing God and being at peace with men:—*I. THE SUBSTANCE. "When a man's ways please the Lord." All the Lord's ways are centred ways, and they centre in Christ Jesus. Then, in order to please the Lord, we must be found in those ways, and as those ways are in Christ, we must also be in union with Christ. 1. In what way has the Lord fixed the love of His heart upon man? 2. The Lord brings His people to desire eternal life in the same way that He has designed it. 3. In what way has the Lord made us holy? 4. In what way does the Lord regenerate His people? II. THE NEGATIVE; or what the text does not mean. The latter part of the text appears to be negated by the conduct of the enemies of the Lord's people in all ages. III. THE POSITIVE; or what the text does mean. Refer to a Scripture passage, "The wrath of man shall praise Thee; the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain." Illustrate by circumstances in the stories of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, David, Nehemiah, Jews when building the second temple. IV. THE IMPLICATION. 1. That the Lord has some specific purpose and end in view. 2. That He is sure to accomplish that purpose. (*James Wells.*) *The charm of goodness:—*Not that the enemies are simply kept quiet through their knowledge that the good man is under God's protection, but that goodness has power to charm and win them to itself. (*Dean Plumptre.*) *God's control over His people's enemies:—*I must see that my ways please the Lord. Even then I shall have enemies; and, perhaps, all the more certainly because I endeavour to do that which is right. But what a promise this is! The Lord will abate the wrath of man to praise Him, and abate it so that it shall not distress me. He can constrain an enemy to desist from harming me, even though he has a mind to do so. This He did with Laban, who pursued Jacob, but did not dare to touch him. Or He can subdue the wrath of Esau, who met Jacob in a brotherly manner, though Jacob had dreaded that he would smite him and his family with the sword. The Lord can also convert a furious adversary into a brother in Christ, and a fellow-worker, as He did with Saul of Tarsus. Oh, that He would do this in every case where a persecuting spirit appears! Happy is the man whose enemies are made to be to him what the lions were to Daniel in the den—quiet and companionable! When I meet death, who is called the last enemy, I pray that I may be at peace. Only let my great care be to please the Lord in all things. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 9. A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.—On the government of human affairs by providence:—The efforts of our activity, how great soever they may be, are subject to the control of a superior, invisible power. Higher counsels than ours are concerned in the issues of human conduct. The line is let out to allow us to run a certain length, but by that line we are all the while invisibly held, and are recalled and checked at the pleasure of Heaven. Among all who admit the existence of a Deity it has been a general belief that He exercises some government over human affairs. In what manner providence interposes in human affairs, by what means it influences the thoughts and counsels of men, and, notwithstanding the influence which it exerts, leaves to them the freedom of will and choice, are subjects of a dark and mysterious nature. The secret power with which God controls sun, moon, and stars is equally inexplicable. Throughout the sacred writings God is represented as, on every occasion, by various dispensations of His providence, rewarding the righteous or chastening them according as His wisdom requires, and punishing the wicked. The experience of every one bears testimony to a particular providence. Accident and chance and fortune are words without meaning. In God's universe nothing comes to pass causelessly or in vain. Every event has its own determined direction. But this doctrine of a particular providence has no tendency to supersede counsel, design, or a proper exertion of the active powers of man. Man, "devising his own way," and carrying on his own plans, has a place in the order of means which providence employs. The doctrine of the text is to be improved—1. For correcting anxious and immoderate care about the future events of our life. The folly of such anxiety is aggravated by this consideration, that all events are under a much better and wiser direction than we could place them. To the unavoidable evils of life do not add this evil of thine own procuring, a tormenting anxiety about the success of thy designs. The great rule both of religion and duty is—Do thy duty and leave the issue to Heaven. 2. The doctrine of the text is calculated to enforce moderation of mind in every state; it humbles the pride of prosperity and prevents that despair which is incident to adversity. 3. This doctrine places the vanity and folly of all sinful plans in a very strong light. All sin, in every view of it, must be attended with danger. 4. It concerns us to perform those duties which a proper regard to providence requires, and to obtain protection from that power which directeth and disposeth all. An interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man. Without His favour the wisest will be disappointed and baffled; under His protection and guidance the simple are led in a plain and sure path. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The infallible Director of man*.—The doctrine of the text is matter of uniform experience. Little indeed does any one know what lies before him. I. THE GUIDANCE OF GOD MAY BE TRACED IN THE DISPENSATIONS OF HIS PROVIDENCE. No natural causes can explain the wonderful events that occurred from the call of Abraham to the time of the Redeemer. In every scene, not only the miraculous, but the ordinary, the hand of the Deity is visible. We can often see clearly the traces of that hand when its work is done. II. THE SENTIMENT OF THE TEXT RECEIVES ITS FULLEST EXEMPLIFICATION IN THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE. In a way the most improbable, and at a time the least expected, the God of all grace has laid hold upon the soul. Illustrate from the woman of Samaria, and from Zaccheus. The means, no less than the time and occasion, are of God. Some striking providence, some simple truth repeated for the thousandth time, some whispered admonition of a Christian friend, awakes attention, excites to immediate consideration, and bows down the soul in true contrition and prayer. The teaching of the text is also illustrated in the removal of the fear of death when the death-time comes. (*W. E. Schenck.*) *Man proposing, God disposing*.—We cherish hopes, we make plans; but there is a higher power that directs our steps. The ideas of fate and chance have been entertained by men in all ages of the world to account for these experiences. Scripture knows nothing of fate or chance. It is the Lord who is directing our steps. Look at this directing work of God overruling our purposes—1. In the success or failure of our daily business. Man uses what discretion and judgment he has, but when he has done all much is left to circumstances over which he has no control. Generally it may be said that the diligent and persevering are the most successful, but there are many cases in which the rule will not apply. Success will sometimes come to the careless. Failure will sometimes come to the most diligent. Perhaps almost the last place in which we should look to find the hand of God is the business of the world. 2. In the choice of our occupations in

life. What an amount of selecting and rejecting goes on in the mind of many a boy! He little thinks his choice will rest at last with One who knows better far than he knows for what he is adapted. There are few who, in choosing their occupations in life, have not had wishes of their own, and there are few who, in looking back, do not find that those wishes have been overruled. God is working out some kind and wise purpose by putting us where we are. 3. In the choice of our friendships. An unexpected meeting with a person may alter our whole career. God is as certainly working in the minor as He is in the greater events of our lives. (S. G. Matthews, B.A.) *The plan of man, and the plan of God, in human life:—*

I. MAN'S OWN PLAN. "A man's heart deviseth his way." Every man forms a programme of his daily life. When he moves rationally, he does not move by blind impulse. That man's history is self-originated and self-arranged is manifested from three things. 1. Society holds every man responsible for his actions. 2. The Bible appeals to every man as having a personal sovereignty. 3. Every man's conscience attests his freedom of action. If the sinner felt himself the mere creature of forces he could not control, he could experience no remorse. Man feels that his life is fashioned by his own plan, that he is the undisputed monarch of his own inner world. **II. GOD'S OWN PLAN.** "The Lord directeth his steps." God has a plan concerning every man's life—a plan which, though it compasses and controls every activity, leaves the man in undisturbed freedom. This is the great problem of the world's history, man's freedom, and God's control. "Experience," says Mr. Bridges, "gives a demonstrable stamp of evidence even in all the minutiae of circumstances which form the parts and pieces of the Divine plan. A matter of common business, the indulgence of curiosity, the supply of necessary want, a journey from home, all are connected with infinitely important results. And often when our purpose seemed as clearly fixed, and as sure of accomplishment as a journey to London, this way of our own devising has been blocked up by unexpected difficulties, and unexpected facilities have opened an opposite way, with the ultimate acknowledgment, "He led me forth in the right way" (Psa. cxii. 7; Isa. xlii. 16). After all, however, we need much discipline to wean us from our own devices, that we may seek the Lord's direction in the first place. The fruit of this discipline will be a dread of being left to our own devices, as before we were eager to follow them (Psa. cxliii. 10). So truly do we find our happiness and security in yielding up our will to our heavenly Guide! He knows the whole way, every step of the way: "The end from the beginning." And never shall we miss either the way or the end, if only we resign ourselves with unreserved confidence to His keeping, and the direction of our steps. (*Homilist.*) *The folly of self-confidence:—*

"A man's heart," that is, his mind, his inward powers of reflection, anticipation, skill, prudence, "deviseth his way"—a term implying the application of all possible consideration, invention, and precaution—but the "Lord directeth his steps." The words express and expose the folly and presumption, on man's part, of self-confidence—of his thus assuring himself of success, as if he had the future under his eye, and at his bidding; regardless of that hidden but ever-present, ever-busy superintending power that has all under complete command; that can at once arrest his progress in the very midst and at the very height of his boasting, and "turn to foolishness" all his devices. The sacred oracles are full of this sentiment, and of the most striking exemplifications of its truth. And what is the sentiment of revelation cannot fail to command the concurrence of enlightened reason. It must be so. If there is a God at all it cannot be otherwise. It were the height of irrationality as well as impiety for a moment to question it—to imagine the contrary possible. How otherwise could God govern the world? Were not all human schemes under supreme and irresistible control, what would become of the certainty of the Divine? All must of necessity fulfil the plans of Infinite Wisdom in the administration of God's universal government. "God will work, and who shall let it?" (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Orderings of providence:—*

Young Clive is shipped off, to get rid of him, in the East India Company, and he becomes the founder of England's empire in India. The Duke of Wellington seeks of Lord Camden in early life a place at the Treasury Board, and becomes the military hero of Europe. There are many to-day occupying positions very different to those which they set before themselves in early life. Some are preaching the gospel who were destined to practise at the English bar. Some are lawyers who started to be physicians. Some are business men who started to be artists or musicians. David Livingstone starts as a hand in a Glasgow factory, and he becomes the pioneer of missionary work in Africa. William Carey makes shoes,

and he becomes the most successful missionary in India. Looking back on life, we say it was this or that event which impelled us on another course. We are apt to forget that the event was no chance accident, but a distinct factor in God's government of our lives.

Ver. 11. A just weight and balance are the Lord's.—*A just balance*:—It is a part of the Lord's watchful activity and direct connection with all the affairs of human life that He is interested in our business and trade. The Israelite was encouraged to think that all the work in which he was engaged was ordained by, and therefore under the observation of, his God. The commercial fraud of the primitive times took a comparatively simple form. The merchant used inadequate measures, and so nibbled a little from every article which he sold to a customer. It requires many generations for a civilised society to elaborate commercial fraud on the large scale. 1. We are all of us tempted to think that a considerable proportion of our life is too insignificant to attract the particular attention of God. We think He marks what business we enter, but when we are in it lets us alone. Or He marks a large business transaction in which there is room for a really gigantic fraud, but cannot pay any attention to a minute sale over the counter, the trivial adulteration of a common article, the ingenious subterfuge for disposing of a damaged or useless stock. But could anything be more illogical? Great and small are relative terms, and have no significance with God. If He knows us at all, He knows all about us. The whole life, with every detail from birth to death, is accurately photographed in the light of His omniscience. 2. In this exhaustive and detailed knowledge of the way in which you are conducting your business His warm approval follows everything that is honest and just; His vehement censure lights on all that is dishonest and unjust. We have no reason for thinking that the unjust balance has become any less abominable to the Lord because the eager and relentless competition of modern industrial life has multiplied, while it has refined the methods of fraud and has created a condition of things in which, as so many people urge, questionable practices have become actually necessary for one who would keep his head above water. Double-dealing, no matter what may be the plea, is abominable in the sight of the Lord. 3. All should order their business ways as in the sight of God, and concern themselves chiefly with the thought how they may be in conformity with His holy will. Do not be content with estimating your conduct by the judgment which other men would pass upon it. Do not be content even with estimating your conduct by the standard of your own unaided conscience. Unless you realise that God sees and knows, and unless you humbly submit everything to His judgment, you are sure to go wrong; your standard will insensibly fall, and you will insensibly fall away even from the fallen standard. You will not alter His judgment of your conduct by attempting to ignore it. But by seeking to understand it, and by laying your heart open to be influenced by it, you will find that your conduct is perceptibly altered, and apparent impossibilities are overcome, because "by the fear of the Lord men depart from evil." (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *Weighed in the balances*:—A man once declared that he wished he had a window in his breast, that all men might see his heart and motives. How many of us would like to look into our own hearts and discover our motives? Because we fear to be face to face with ourselves self-examination is so greatly neglected. God looks into our hearts and weighs our motives in His just and unchanging balance. Our daily work is being weighed in God's balances, and it is a weighing for eternity. People make a great mistake about their preparations for eternity. It is the duty of a Christian man to prepare for eternity every day he lives by trying to do his duty in the place where God puts him. Temptations and trials are weights and scales by which God tries our hearts. Perhaps you are vexed by a spiteful tongue that speaks cruelly and unjustly. That is a balance in which you are weighed to see whether your heart is right with God, whether you bear your trials meekly, giving back the soft answer, not rendering evil for evil. So every other trial or sorrow is a test, a weighing, to prove whether you are the true gold or base alloy. Prosperity and success are God's balances. Every religious rite and service are means by which God weighs us. There are yet two more weighings to come. At our death we shall be weighed and placed in our proper waiting-place till the last judgment. Then will come the final weighing and the eternal sentence. (*H. J. Wilmot-Buxton, M.A.*)

Ver. 12. For the throne is established by righteousness.—*Religious principles*

the best support of government :—I. **RIGHTEOUSNESS MOST EFFECTUALLY ANSWERS THE END AND DESIGN OF GOVERNMENT.** Religion consists in an acknowledgment of God as Governor of the world. Though the power be lodged in earthen vessels, there is no power but of God. This religious sense of a providential government will incline the subject to pay due reverence to the prince, because it reaches farther than his own person, and is ultimately referred to that Divine Original, whose image and representative he is. Religion fixes our duty to our sovereign upon a certain basis and derives our obedience from the noblest motives, not from a slavish fear, not from an occasional humour, not from a mercenary regard to temporal interest, but from a filial love and respect to the Lord of glory. An awful regard to God and a prevailing sense of religion possesses the subject with that justice and fidelity which cannot be shaken by any temptation, but stands unmoved against the assaults of danger and the allurements of interest. The fear of God is so powerful a principle of action that it necessarily produces happy effects, and is so mighty a restraint from sin that it almost supersedes the necessity of any other restraint. II. **GUARD AGAINST THOSE PERNICIOUS PRINCIPLES THAT SUBVERT THE THRONE AND ARE DESTRUCTIVE OF GOVERNMENT.** 1. Those that remove the foundations of religion and deny the being of a God. Could these opinions prevail, fidelity and justice would cease and the distinction between right and wrong would be lost in confusion. It is the interest of every prince and people to put a stop to these fatal principles, and not only to discourage atheism itself, but every approach towards it. 2. A scornful neglect of God the Son, and an avowed denial of His divinity, may produce as dreadful effects as even the denial of God the Father. If we renounce the authority of Jesus Christ, the authority of revealed religion is absolutely cancelled. 3. Those republican doctrines which derive all power from the people. 4. The principle that makes an absolute allowance to the sincerity of every man's persuasion and places the whole of religion and the great affair of eternal salvation upon the authority of every private judgment. This is contradictory to an article of our creed; it is fruitful of erroneous sects and impious heresies, and it has a pernicious influence upon the State. If the sincerity of men's present persuasions will justify them in all their consequences, the more strongly they are persuaded so much the more abundantly will they be justified. And if they are hurried on to the commission of any evil action the strength of the impulse will sanctify the crime. Let us, then, show our regard to government by discharging our duty to God. (*T. Newlin, M.A.*)

Ver. 15. In the light of the king's countenance is life.—*The blessedness of the king's favour* :—This is a general proverb. Its primary application is to royalty. In the previous verse the wrath of a king has been, by a striking metaphor, represented as messengers of death (Esther vii. 6-10). When a king is angry how swift and sure is his vengeance. Before the word goes forth out of his mouth his will is executed; messengers of death stand about him ready to execute his indignant sentence. And so a wise man will seek to soften the king's wrath and pacify him—nay, will keep at peace with him. In this verse "the light of his countenance" and "his favour" supply the antithesis to his wrath. Apply this to the King of kings, and what a sublime lesson on life! Here we have suggested—1. The blessedness of reconciliation. 2. The conditions of serviceableness. A holy life in its ideal combines two elements—abiding in the light and love of God, and yielding fruit in service. This proverb suggests sunshine and shower. He who is reconciled to God in Christ abides in the light of His smile. He walks in light and dwells in love, and so every condition of holiness and happiness is assured. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Ver. 16. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold!—*Wisdom better than wealth* :—I. **THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING.** It is like that which exists between the moving and the acting power, between the principle and the practice, between the plan and the process, between the cause and the effect. Wisdom is the knowledge and preference of the best and worthiest end; understanding is the apprehension and the employment of the means which shall be most effectual for attaining it. The well-being of the imperishable part of man throughout eternity is the chief end of his existence, and the knowledge and preference of this is "wisdom." Then the apprehension and the employment of the means which shall be effectual in obtaining it is "understanding." The habitual avoidance and resistance of all known sin is a sure test of spiritual

"wisdom" and spiritual "understanding." II. WHY ARE WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING TO BE CHOSEN RATHER THAN SILVER AND GOLD? These are more conducive than silver and gold to solid happiness. There are many things in the countless evils which make up man's heritage of woe for which silver and gold can provide no remedy whatever. Wisdom imparts to man the power of subjecting, if not of satisfying the bodily appetites; it makes him rich, if not by increasing his substance, by diminishing his wants; it sets before him the continual feast of a contented heart. And it teaches how to avoid and escape evils. It may also be added that wisdom and understanding are better than gold and silver because they alone can be conducive to the happiness of the "life that is to come." (*T. Dale, M.A.*) *Better than gold* :—But gold is good. Solomon evidently regarded gold as among his most valued possessions. Gold is precious, when we remember all the straits and struggles it can save us from, and all the ease and comfort it can bring. The moral teacher who speaks hard things against gold only confirms those who hear him in the idea that religion will not do for this work-a-day world at all. All the gold you can get by honest labour, conscientiously, by all means get. Ill-gotten gold will ultimately burn both your fingers and your pocket, aye, and scar your soul too. Yes, gold is good, but wisdom is better than gold. To know Christ in the heart as a Saviour, in the mind as a Teacher, in the life as a Pattern, and in all things as a King—this is wisdom. It is the fear of the Lord, the love of His law, faith in His Cross, the power of His Spirit, the hope in His Word. Gold can be but an external possession, a mere accessory of life. Nay, all the luxuries which gold can bring do all the sooner exhaust the senses, and invite their fate. But wisdom, the power of religion, is not external, though it affects all surrounding circumstances for good. Wisdom is a well, a fountain, in the Christian's soul. It is fed, by secret channels, direct from the river of life. Here, then, I take my stand. Gold may be with me, grace shall be in me. Wealth may be about me, wisdom shall be of me, not an endowment, but an enduement. Gold is but lent to me, but God's favour and mercy are eternally mine. (*J. Jackson Wray.*) *Wisdom* :—This is really a mental contrast instituted between the respective values of the two sides of man's nature—the mind and the body, the soul and the senses. In imagination wisdom is made to stand for the one, and gold, the most coveted of earthly possessions, for the other. What to Solomon did "wisdom" mean? What was its warp and woof? what its mental form? There are elements in wisdom that are older than the foundations of the world, nay, that are coeval with the eternal existence of God Himself. There are elements in even human wisdom, as found in every race that has thought and risen to morality and virtue, which are as imperishable as right and as unalterable as the laws of nature. The root of the word "wisdom" is "weis," to know, or to think, clearly. It reappears in the word "wit." Nimbleness in the mental perception of congruity and incongruity is the essence of wit. Wisdom should mean a quick, clear, vivid perception of the true and right relations of every kind of knowledge. A sophist is a man who seeks to gain his ends quite regardless of the means employed. He aims, not at right judgment, but at the triumph of a purpose. True wisdom is the instinctive and resolute right using of knowledge. Knowledge, taken by its naked and unaided self, instead of ennobling a man's character, may even be the most powerful instrument in degrading it. The very core of wisdom is conscience. Wisdom in its broadest aspect is the outcome of manhood, trained, disciplined, and cultured to its highest. It is human nature in equilibrium, the body harnessed, and the soul with a calm grip upon the reins. There are some who banish wisdom from the personal sanctuary of noble spiritual life. They tell us that wisdom is of the head, the intellect—a secular not a sacred quality. Ignore the distinction. A soul without reverence may become learned, but can never become wise. The reverent, the worshipful faculty is of all others the one that lifts man most above the level of the brute. Reverence is human, and it is so because in a high and noble sense humanity is Divine. The retaining this upwardness, this sense of reverence in the soul, is the first and highest duty of every man. This reverence we are in danger of losing. The very greatness of manhood is that wrong-doing and wrong-being are possible to us all, and possible to us always. Right can only be where wrong would have been a possible alternative. "Know thyself" is a maxim of supreme value. We can penetrate into the depths of ourselves, and discover our weakness or strength. No influence is more powerful in our destiny than the formation of right habit. "Sow an act, and you reap a habit; sow a habit, and you reap a character." The chief hindrance to the getting of wisdom is the early formation of habits.

They may morally imprison and slay us. You are responsible before God and man for your character. (*W. H. Dallinger, D.D.*) *Moral and material wealth* :— There are two things implied in this verse. 1. That material wealth is a good thing. "Gold and silver" are not to be despised. These are good—(1) As the creatures of God. All the silver and gold found locked up in the chests of mountains He made. He created nothing in vain. (2) As the means of good. How much good can be accomplished by material wealth. Intellectual, social, moral, religious good. 2. That the pursuit of material wealth is a legitimate thing. I. It is "BETTER" IN ITS POSSESSION. 1. It is better because it enriches the man himself. The wealth of Croesus cannot add a fraction of value to the man. Millionaires are often moral paupers. But moral wealth, the wealth of holy loves, great thoughts, Divine aims, and immortal hopes enrich the man himself. 2. It is better, because it creates higher enjoyments. Money has no necessary power to make men happy. 3. It invests with higher dignities. 4. It is destined to a longer endurance. II. It is BETTER IN ITS PURSUIT. It is better in the getting, the choosing. 1. The pursuit is more ennobling. The mere pursuit of material wealth whilst it develops certain faculties cramps others and deadens the moral sensibilities. Often in the pursuit of riches we see souls that might have expanded into seraphs running into grubs. Not so with the pursuit of true spiritual wisdom. All the faculties are brought into play, and the soul rises in might and majesty. 2. The pursuit is more heavenly. Amongst the millions in the hierarchies of heaven not one soul can be found pursuing material good. Their "excelsior" is for a higher assimilation to the Infinite. 3. The pursuit is more successful. Thousands try for material wealth and fail. The ditches along the road of human enterprise are crowded with those who ran with all their might in the race for wealth, but who fell into the slough of pauperism and destitution. But you will not find one who ever earnestly sought spiritual wealth who failed. Every true effort involves positive attainment. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Wisdom better than gold* :—I. IN WHAT RESPECTS WISDOM IS BETTER THAN GOLD. 1. It is better in its origin. No man has got wisdom without a knowledge of its source and its purity. Whence comes gold? Let the miner answer, who digs it with great labour out of the earth. Whence comes wisdom? Let the Saviour answer, who of God is made unto us wisdom. God is the Source of wisdom. He that teaches man knowledge shall He not know? There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding. 2. It is better in its nature. Refine gold as you may, it has still dross; but the wisdom which cometh from above is pure. Love gold as you may, it never can become part of the mind; but wisdom can be incorporated with it. A rich man may have to leave his gold, or his gold may leave him; but no matter to what a wise man is subjected, he carries his wisdom with him. 3. It is better in its influence. Although gold is a good thing in itself, it has often a bad influence on depraved minds. Its possession not unfrequently contracts the mind, blunts the feelings, and increases covetousness. II. FOR WHAT PURPOSES IS WISDOM BETTER THAN GOLD? 1. It is better for guiding a man in the affairs of this life. How many, when they come to possess gold, show themselves to be fools! They spend it improperly, and damage their health, ruin their character, disgrace their friends. How much inferior is gold to wisdom! This gives a man forethought, teaches him to avoid evil, to improve time, and to conduct his affairs with discretion. It gives to the young man hope of success, to the middle-aged man perseverance in a right course, and to the aged man the reward of his diligence. Without it, the scholar can make no advancement, the traveller no interesting observations, nor the genius any important discoveries. By wisdom all the arts and sciences have been advanced. 2. It is better for guiding a man in the choice of things for another life. God is the very essence of wisdom. This, in the view of created intelligences, makes Him greater than His dominions do: He created man, and put wisdom within him, and riches around him; these riches could not have kept him from falling, but his wisdom could. No amount of gold or riches could reinstate him after he fell. But by wisdom he was restored. By wisdom God baffled Satan's designs and bruised his head. III. TO WHAT DEGREE IS IT BETTER TO GET WISDOM THAN GOLD? 1. It is better, as the soul is more valuable than the body. The body is subject to decay, and must soon go down to the dust. The soul is immortal, and though it must leave the body at death, it continues its existence in another state. What can gold do for it then? How much better is wisdom, which adorns the soul with heavenly graces, and makes it shine in the beauties of holiness. Blessed with heavenly wisdom, the soul is rich for eternity.

2. It is better, as eternity is more enduring than time. Gold had its beginning in this world, and will end with it. Wisdom comes from another world and will continue in it. 3. It is better, as heaven is more glorious than this world. 4. It is better, as its possession gives more lasting happiness. 5. It is better, as a crown of glory is more dignifying than a crown of gold. (1) Learn the great importance of being wise for eternity. (2) True wisdom is now to be found. (3) Let me entreat you, ask wisdom of the Lord. (*John Miller.*) *Better than gold:—*A few years ago the news of gold in California spread like wildfire all over the country. Everybody wanted to go and get some. The storekeeper shut up his shop and went. The mason threw down his trowel and went. The farmer left his crops, and the shoemaker his last, and hurried off to the land of gold. The excitement was so great that it was called the "gold fever." Good as that getting was thought to be, there is something better to get, better than a whole gold-mine. Why is it so much better? 1. You cannot be robbed of it. Wisdom cannot be stolen. Neither can fire burn it, or water drown it. Locusts cannot eat it, or blight or mildew harm it. Bad times cannot damage its value, or bad partners gamble it away. You may sail round the world, and not leave it behind. You may be shipwrecked, and not lose it. You may be put in prison and carry it with you. It is not too rich for a cottage, or too poor for a palace. Sickness does not cheapen its worth, or health add to it. Nothing robs it of its value. Times and seasons, which alter everything else, make no alteration in this. 2. Wisdom is better than gold, because it pays better. "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It says in keeping God's commands there is "great reward." Yes, wisdom yields a greater profit, a better gain, than gold or silver. Can gold buy the pardon of sin? Can it get you peace and happiness? Can it secure to you room in heaven? No, gold cannot purchase these; and these are what you want. When Mr. Astor had acquired his large property, and was called the richest man in the country, "I wish," he said, "I could go back to a poor boy, and make it all over again." The possession of it did not make him happy. Gold does not satisfy. (*Church of England Magazine.*)

Ver. 17. The highway of the upright is to depart from evil.—*Departing from evil:*—In this text is—I. **THE UPRIGHT.** Those who are bent on doing the will of God. Those who keep the commandments of their Maker. Those who endeavour, by God's grace, so to live as to be justified, and pardoned and acquitted in the day of judgment. II. **THE HIGHWAY.** By this is meant the general course, the mode of living, the habitual practice, the constant endeavour, all the thoughts and words and actions of the man at all times. The way, the royal road, the highway of his life. III. **THE TERM "DEPART."** It does not say, "The highway of the upright is not to do evil"—that is true; but it does not say so here. The text is "depart from evil," go from it; give it his back; walk off and leave it behind; shun it as an adder; avoid it as a scorpion; flee from it as a serpent. IV. **EVIL.** Need not concern ourselves with the origin of evil. We have enough to do with the thing as it is. We find its presence everywhere. The two principles, good and evil, must live as long as the world lasts; and live constantly at variance, constantly fighting against one another, constantly overcoming one another. It is ours to avoid the one and cleave to the other—that is our wisest course; that is our plainest duty. All the actions of life must be either good or evil. There is, and there can be, no neutrality in them. The degree of goodness or badness may be great or small, but the one or the other they must be. We are speaking of moral evil. There is what is called natural evil, i.e., evil belonging to the material and physical world around us. But what is it that makes one thing or action good and another evil? Who is it that pronounces on the quality of actions? Where is the rule by which we are to determine what is right or wrong? It is the will of that Being who gives us the power by which all we do is done—that will makes things right or wrong. It is the manifestation of that will in the Bible; therefore the Bible contains the rule, the law, by which all our actions are to be judged and determined. It is there we must find what is right and what is wrong. We may divide evil into two branches—1. Actions that are wrong in themselves. 2. Actions that are wrong only on account of their effects. Thus far we have spoken of actions individually considered. But God has created other men and women beside ourselves, and placed them and us to dwell on the face of the earth together. They bear certain relations to us, and we to them. These relations give rise to certain common interests; and these interests, again, to certain laws and regulations by which they are sustained

and guarded. These laws must be consulted in all public acts, and the breach of one of these laws on the part of a member of the community is an evil. These remarks apply to men as members of families and of communities, as citizens of towns and cities, as subjects of countries and kingdoms, as fellows of all men besides. A public act is an evil if it bring more evil than good to the community as a whole, and as a community, therefore, you ought to condemn and prevent an act which brings more evil than good into your midst. (*Maxwell M. Ben Oziel.*)

Ver. 18. Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.—*Shame and contempt the end of pride.*—I. SHOW WHAT PRIDE AND HAUGHTINESS MEAN. Pride is thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. It is a corruption of self-love, it is self-flattery. A man thinks too highly of himself when he thinks that anything he has is his own; or when he conceives himself to have what he really has not; or when he challenges more respect than is due to him on the score of what he has. Pride is not peculiar to persons of any one rank. II. ILLUSTRATE THE TRUTH OF THIS OBSERVATION FROM SCRIPTURE AND REASON. Pride will generally have a fall. 1. Argue from the reason of the thing itself, and its natural tendency. Some kinds of pride are very expensive. Pride is very contentious, and makes a man enemies. Pride makes men over-confident in their own efficiency. Vanity runs men into error and mistakes. 2. Argue that God has particularly declared His detestation of pride, and His resolution to punish it. The whole tenor of Scripture intimates how exceeding hateful pride is to Almighty God. The reasons for it are obvious. Pride is improper and unbecoming our condition and circumstances. It is an inlet to all vices. Reflections: (1) Here is a proper consideration for dissuading men from pride, or curing them of it. (2) Commend the humility which is spoken so highly of in Scripture. (*D. Waterland, D.D.*) *The vice of pride.*—This vice is animadverted on with peculiar severity in this Book of Proverbs. For this two reasons may be assigned. I. THE EXTENSIVENESS OF THE SIN. Pride is a corruption that seems almost originally ingrafted in our nature; it exerts itself in our first years, and, without continual endeavours to suppress it, influences our last. Other vices tyrannise over particular ages, and triumph in particular countries; but pride is the native of every country, infects every climate, and corrupts every nation. It mingles with all our other vices, and without the most constant and anxious care will mingle also with our virtues. II. THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PREACHER. Pride was probably a crime to which Solomon himself was most violently tempted. He was placed in every circumstance that could expose him to it. He had the pride of royalty, prosperity, knowledge, and wealth to suppress. 1. Consider the nature of pride, with its attendants and consequences. It is an immoderate degree of self-esteem, or an over-value set by a man upon himself. It is founded originally on an intellectual falsehood. In real life pride is always attended with kindred passions, and produces effects equally injurious to others and destructive to itself. He that over-values himself will under-value others, and he that under-values others will oppress them. Pride has been able to harden the heart against compassion, and stop the ears against the cry of misery. He that sets too high a value upon his own merits will, of course, think them ill rewarded with his present condition. To pride must be attributed most of the fraud, injustice, violence, and extortion, by which wealth is frequently acquired. Another concomitant of pride is envy, or the desire of debasing others. Another is an insatiable desire of propagating in others the favourable opinion he entertains of himself. No proud man is satisfied with being simply his own admirer. 2. The usual motives to pride. We grow proud by comparing ourselves with others weaker than ourselves. Another common motive to pride is knowledge. Another, a consciousness of virtue. Spiritual pride is generally accompanied with great uncharitableness and severe censures of others, and may obstruct the great duty of repentance. It may be well to conclude with the amiableness and excellence of humility. "With the lowly there is wisdom." (*S. Johnson, LL.D.*) *Knowledge nourishes humility.*—We may arm ourselves against the haughty spirit which Solomon speaks of as precursor of a fall. There is a tendency in knowledge to the producing of humility, so that the more a man knows, the more likely is he to think little of himself. The arrogant and conceited person is ordinarily the superficial and ignorant. The man of real powers and great acquirements is usually a simple and unaffected man. He who knows most is most conscious of how little he knows. There is no truer definition of human knowledge than that

it is the knowledge of human ignorance. Oh singular constitution of pride, that its very existence should be our proof of its absurdity! Try the affirmation that knowledge produces humility, in relation to our state by nature, and to our state by grace. Pride proves deficiency of knowledge in both these respects. As to man's natural condition, how can anybody be proud who knows that condition? There is no such contrast as that which may be drawn between man a fallen creature, and man a redeemed creature. But this does not puff the redeemed man up with pride, seeing redemption is not his work, but emanates from free-grace. Therefore, study ye yourselves; pray God for the aid of His Spirit to discover you to yourselves. Then you may grow up into the stature of the perfect man. (H. Melvill, B.D.)

Pride and humility.—I. PRIDE AS THE PRECURSOR OF RUIN. Pride and haughtiness are equivalents. What is here predicted of pride—1. Agrees with its nature. It is according to the instinct of pride to put its subject in an unnatural, and, therefore, in an unsafe position. The proud man's foot is on quicksand, not on rock. 2. Agrees with its history. Destruction always has followed in its march. II. HUMILITY IS THE PLEDGE OF GOOD. What are all the spoils of earth's haughty conquerors to be compared with the blessedness of a genuinely humble soul? "Humility," says Sir Benjamin Brodie, "leads to the highest distinction, because it leads to self-improvement. Study to know your own character; endeavour to learn, and to supply your own deficiencies; never assume to yourselves qualities which you do not possess." (*Homilist*.) *The dangers of pride*.—I. WHAT IS IT WE ARE TO BEWARE OF? Pride and a haughty spirit. 1. Lofty thoughts of ourselves. 2. Disdain of others. 3. Boastful talk. 4. Rash and vain actions. II. THE EVILS OF PRIDE. 1. It separates us from God (Psa. cxxxviii. 6; ver. 5). 2. Makes men hate us. 3. Brings us to ruin. Examples and illustrations: Pharaoh, Goliath, Absalom, Sennacherib, Belshazzar, Haman, Lucifer, the Pharisees, Herod, Wolsey ("I and the king"), Napoleon Bonaparte, Boulanger. (R. Brewin.) *The downfall of pride*.—A kite having risen to a very great height, moved in the air as stately as a prince, and looked down with much contempt on all below. "What a superior being I am now!" said the kite; "who has ever ascended so high as I have? What a poor grovelling set of beings are all those beneath me! I despise them." And then he shook his head in derision, and then he wagged his tail; and again he steered along with so much state as if the air were all his own, and as if everything must make way before him; when suddenly the string broke, and down fell the kite with greater haste than he ascended, and was greatly hurt in the fall. Pride often meets with a downfall. (W. Cobbin.)

Ver. 19. **Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.**—*The character and conduct of the lowly under affliction*.—There is a generation of lowly afflicted ones, having their spirit lowered and brought down to their lot, whose case, in that respect, is better than that of the proud getting their will, and carrying all to their mind. 1. There is a generation of lowly afflicted ones in the world, as bad as the world is. They are in this world, where the state of trial is. 2. If it were not so, Christ, as He was in the world, would have no followers in it. 3. Nevertheless, they are very rare in this world. Many a high-bended spirit keeps on the bend in spite of lowering circumstances. 4. They can be no more in number than the truly godly. To bring the spirit truly to a low and crossed lot must be the effect of humbling grace. 5. A lowly disposition of soul, and habitual aim and bent of the heart that way, has a very favourable construction put upon it in heaven. Enter into particulars of the character of the lowly. There is a yoke of affliction, of one kind or other, oftentimes upon them. There is a particular yoke of affliction, which God has chosen for them, that hangs about them, and is seldom, if ever, off them. That is their special trial, the crook in their lot. They think soberly and meanly of themselves, but highly and honourably of God. They think favourably of others, as far as in justice they may. They are sunk down into a state of subordination to God's will. They are not bent on high things, but disposed to stoop to low things. They are apt to magnify mercies bestowed on them. Consider the generation of the proud, getting their will, and carrying all to their mind. 1. There are crosses in their lot. Sin has turned the world from a paradise to a thicket; there is no getting through without being scratched. The pride of the heart exposes them particularly to crosses. They have an over-value for themselves. Men are bigger in their own conceit than they are indeed. They have an unmortified self-will.

They have a crowd of unsubdued passions taking part with the self-will. But a holy God crosses the self-will of the proud creatures by His providence, overruling and disposing of things contrary to their inclination. Getting their will, and carrying all to their mind, tells of holy Providence yielding to the man's unmortified self-will, and letting it go according to his mind; it tells also of the lust remaining in its strength and vigour; of the cross removed; and of the man's pleasure in having carried his point. Confirm the doctrine of the text, that the case of the former is better than that of the latter. 1. Humility is a piece of the image of God. Pride is the masterpiece of the image of the devil. 2. Humility and lowliness of spirit qualify us for friendly communion and intercourse with God in Christ. Pride makes God our enemy. 3. Humility is a duty pleasing to God, pride a sin pleasing to the devil. Those whose spirits are brought down to their afflicted lot have quiet and repose of mind. This is a great blessing, upon which the comfort of life depends. Our whole trouble in our lot ariseth from the disagreement of our mind therewith. The proud can but make a better condition in outward things; but humility makes a better man; and the man is more valuable than all external conveniences that attend him. (*T. Boston.*)

Ver. 20. **He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good: and whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he.**—*Trust in God—true wisdom.*—Wisdom is man's true path—that which enables him to accomplish best the end of his being, and which, therefore, gives to him the richest enjoyment and the fullest play for all his powers. Give man wisdom, in the true sense of the term, and he rises to all the dignity that manhood can possibly know. But where shall this wisdom be found? He that trusts in the Lord has found out the way to handle matters wisely, and happy is he. Take this text—I. WITH REGARD TO THE WISE HANDLING OF MATTERS OF TIME WHICH CONCERN OUR BODIES AND OUR SOULS WHILST WE ARE HERE BELOW. Satan says, to handle a matter wisely is to make your own will your law; or he says, "Be crafty"; or he moderates his tone and says, "Be careful." It is often said to the young man, "Be self-reliant; be independent." The true way of wisdom is to act in all prudence and in all uprightness, but to rely simply and entirely on God. Faith is as much the rule of temporal as of spiritual life. Trust God, and you will not have to mourn because you have used sinful means to grow rich. Trust God, and you will not be guilty of self-contradiction. II. IN SPIRITUAL MATTERS, HE THAT HANDLETH A MATTER WISELY SHALL FIND GOOD. Here Satan tempts to be careless or to be credulous; or he bids us work out our own salvation. The true way of dealing wisely here is believing in Christ, trusting Him fully. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The conditions of a happy life.*—I. SKILFUL MANAGEMENT. "He that handleth a matter wisely shall find good." Skilful management in every department of life is of the utmost importance. 1. It is so in intellectual improvement. The man who desires to get a well-informed and a well-disciplined mind must arrange both the subjects and the seasons of study with skill. Method is of primary moment in the business of intellect. 2. It is so in mercantile engagements. 3. It is so in spiritual culture. A wise selection of the best readings, and the most favourable seasons for devotion cannot be dispensed with if great spiritual good is to be got. II. A WELL-STATED HEART. "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." God is the stay of the heart. 1. He is happy in his love. 2. He is happy in his policy. 3. He is happy in his speech. "And the sweetness of his lips increaseth learning." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The happiness of trusting in God.*—This proverb builds on the ground that all men desire happiness. Philosophers, in all ages of the world, have been trying to find out and teach what is man's greatest good; and people generally, from the days of David, have been asking, "Who will show us any good?" The Stoics gave one answer, the Epicureans another, as to man's chief good. Those who now ask, "Is life worth living?" agree with neither. It is doubtless the case, that the devotee of wealth, of fame, of power, or social eminence finds, whenever he is successful in his efforts, that neither wealth nor fame, neither power nor eminence in social position, gives the happiness which he sought therein. The results of thousands of years of experiments and of experience, before and since Solomon's day, are set forth in the words of the proverb which is my text, "Whoso trusteth in the Lord, happy is he." I. TRUST IN GOD IS THE GROUND ON WHICH MAN FINDS FREEDOM FROM THE BONDAGE OF SIN, and FROM THE PAINFUL SENSE OF THE CONDEMNATION DUE TO HIM FOR HIS SIN. Every one knows, and sometimes feels, that he is a sinful man. This sense of sin is felt in the greatest variety of circumstances. It

may arise in a man's breast when his condition is most prosperous—when he is driving forward some business on which his heart has long been set. Sometimes this painful consciousness of guilt springs up after the accomplishment of some undertaking which has taxed one's powers for months, or even years. It is not unfrequently the case that a man is disturbed in this way soon after he has yielded to some evil thought or impulse, or soon after he has neglected to perform some duty. The world is full of instances of this sense of sin in times of danger and calamity. Thus King Saul felt it in his last days. Thus the brothers of Joseph found it pierced their hearts when they were in trouble. Thus it overwhelmed the soul of King David when the prophet Nathan told him the tender story of the poor citizen and his lamb. But this painful sense of sin comes to other persons than these terrible offenders. Is there any person here who did not feel it even in his childhood? It comes, perhaps, after some act of disobedience or neglect toward father or mother. Perhaps it arose after some feeling of anger, or of envy toward brother or sister. It may have sprung up in the mind after some unkind word or selfish act toward playmate or schoolfellow. This fearful consciousness of sin has been many a time felt when thought has been given to the truth, that God has appointed death for every man, and the judgment after it. The poets of human nature abound in the manifestation of this painful sense of sin. Milton represents a guilty spirit as saying that others little know under what torments inwardly he groans, so that he has to cry in his agony, "Which way I fly is hell; myself am hell!" This sense of sin, which is felt with all degrees of painfulness, all who trust in the Lord find relieved by the assurance of His forgiveness through His Son Jesus Christ. For "there is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." II. WHOEVER TRUSTS GOD IS NO LONGER HOSTILE TO HIM. THE ENMITY OF THE HEART AGAINST THE MOST HIGH AND THE MOST HOLY ONE CEASES. Accepted in the Beloved, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This gives the faithful happiness. It was no shallow source of joy for the brothers of Joseph (when their sin had found them out) to be made sure that there was peace between the ruler of Egypt and themselves; and it is not a small boon for any man, conscious of his sin, to know that there is reconciliation and peace between himself and his Omnipotent Maker and righteous Judge, through the mediation and redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ. III. ANOTHER REASON WHY THE MAN WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD IS HAPPY MAY BE SEEN IN THIS FACT—NAMELY, THAT HE HAS THE INDWELLING OF THE DIVINE SPIRIT TO MAINTAIN HIS SPIRITUAL AND ETERNAL LIFE. If the faithful had to rely upon their own wisdom, strength, and other resources, they might soon despair of perseverance in the Christian life. But whosoever trusteth in the Lord is not abandoned by the Almighty. The Holy Ghost, who is given unto the faithful, sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts; and neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate them from the love of God. IV. THE MAN WHOSE TRUST IS IN GOD HAS THE FEELING OF HAPPINESS BECAUSE HE HAS THE ASSURANCE OF SAFETY AND SALVATION. There is, indeed, a sense of security in some persons which springs not from the full trust of the heart in God; but it exists because there is no need to Him. A man may build his hope of everlasting happiness and heaven on no better foundation than the lie which the fool tells to his heart when he says there is no God. He may build it on his own thoughtlessness in respect to the existence, the character, the law, and the purposes and judgments of God. This kind of assurance of safety is the belief of some prodigals that they will never become spendthrifts. It is the assurance of some drunkards that they will never drink too much, and become intemperate. How different is the safe and serene condition of the man who puts his trust in God! V. WHOEVER TRUSTS IN THE LORD IS HAPPY BECAUSE HE DELIGHTS IN GOD AND DESIRES TO DO HIS DUTY TOWARD HIM. Some children love their parents, delight in them, and find a rich gratification in pleasing and obeying them. The manifestation of their filial affection is charming to others. The outflow of it is joy to themselves. Very much of their happiness springs from it. The faithful generally delight in doing their duty toward God. The way of duty is their chosen path. The sources of their joy never fail. They are not surface streams that freeze over in winter and run dry in summer. The touch of death cannot reach them. They are as perpetual in heaven as upon earth. VI. WHOEVER TRUSTS IN GOD IS HAPPY BECAUSE THE DIVINE PROVIDENCE IS UNCHANGEABLY SET TO DO THE FAITHFUL GOOD. (*E. Whitaker, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. *The wise in heart shall be called prudent.*—*The wise in heart* :— I. THESE WORDS ARE AN ASSERTION THAT TRUE WISDOM WILL SHOW ITSELF IN A PRUDENT CONDUCT OF LIFE. His wisdom will gain him the reputation of a discreet, serious, and sensible man. Wisdom is the mother of intellectual and prudence of practical virtues. It may be said that wisdom may be separated from prudence, that knowing and doing are two things. There are many men in the world who have wise heads and foolish hearts—men of good capacities, clear understandings, well improved by reading and observation; but they have some odd humour, fond opinion, beloved lust, which hinders them from living according to their knowledge. Such wise men as these Solomon puts into the catalogue of his “fools,” because they have the means of doing well in their power, and make no use of them. The prudent man is careful to enter upon good ways, and walk uprightly in them. He chooses honest ends, and takes honest methods to attain them. A false and counterfeited wisdom is wholly made up of fallacies and cunning devices. “The folly of fools is deceit.” Their sense, learning, reasonings, and vivacity of wit serve but to heighten their folly, to sweeten their delusions, and confirm them in their errors. This is the case where wisdom rests only in the head; but when it descends to the heart, and warms the affections with the love of that which is good, it fails not to bless the world with a truly valuable and useful man. He that is truly wise differs from a conceited, talkative man in this, that he thankfully receives good advice, and avoids the dangers of which he is admonished. II. A COMPARISON BETWEEN WISDOM AND ELOQUENCE. The powerful charms of eloquence add value to wisdom. Solomon in several places testifies his approbation of ornaments of speech. Wisdom and eloquence united together are very desirable talents in a legislator, governor, or teacher of religion. Moses and Jeremiah seem, however, to have lacked this gift of eloquence. Eloquence should be put under the direction of wisdom. There is no heresy or other error in religion but what has prevailed and gained acceptance by abused eloquence. III. THE WORDS OF THE TEXT INTIMATE A RULE OF PROFITABLE TEACHING. In order to get wisdom, we must study to know ourselves, and see what faculties and talents God hath bestowed upon us, and by daily use and exercise improve them, and add both to their weight and number. Jesus Christ is called the “Wisdom of God,” as containing in Himself all the treasures of Divine wisdom. His hearers asked, “Whence hath this man this wisdom?” His prudence was far superior to the craft and contrivance of His enemies. He had also all external advantages of an eloquent speaker. They said, “Never man spake like this man.” The same gifts He promised to bestow on His apostles for the same end and purpose. He that seeks after wisdom by his prayers to God, and his reading and hearing of His holy Word, and honest application of it in the ordering of his life, shall not seek in vain. Though his wisdom seem at first but as a grain of mustard-seed, by a diligent cultivation of it that wisdom will wonderfully increase and bring forth abundance of fruit. (*W. Reading, M.A.*) *Wise-hearted folk* :—The “wise in heart” are those who, under the influences of sound principles, know how to “order their affairs with discretion.” Men of the most splendid powers and attainments are not always the most remarkable for practical good sense. Better, therefore, in many respects, is the man whose wisdom regulates his temper and affections, his words and actions, aright. That is far more important for the production of personal and social happiness than the most brilliant genius without it. He shall be “called prudent” means his having a character for it: his being looked up to, respected, consulted, confided in, chosen as an adviser. Such a man is more valuable and useful than the man of mere learning, who has not discretion and common sense to guide the use of it. It is, at the same time, of great moment, that along with the possession of wisdom and prudence there be the “sweetness of the lips,” or honeyed lips, gentleness and persuasiveness of counsel, impressive eloquence of speech, which gives vast advantage in the application of wisdom for the benefit of others. It “increaseth learning,” effectually spreading it, rendering others wise as well as the possessor himself. If the “wise in heart” be understood of the truly, spiritually, divinely wise, then the phrase “shall be called prudent” must be interpreted, according to a common Hebrew idiom, as meaning “is prudent,” deserves to be so called. The sentiment will thus be the oft-repeated one, that true religion is the only genuine prudence. Godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Vers. 23, 24. **The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth, and addeth learning to his lips.**—*Ideal eloquence*.—These two verses lead us to infer several things concerning true eloquence. I. **IT IS THE UTTERANCE OF THE TRUE HEART.** "The heart of the wise teacheth his mouth." 1. It is when the genuinely patriotic heart "teacheth the mouth" of the statesman that his speeches are really eloquent, and that his voice bends the senate to his will. 2. It is when the genuinely justice-loving heart "teacheth the mouth" of the counsel that his address is really eloquent, and that he carries the jury with him, and makes the cause of his client triumphant. 3. It is when the genuinely Christ-loving heart "teaches the mouth" of the preacher that his sermons become eloquent, and mighty through God. II. **IT IS THE MEANS OF USEFUL INSTRUCTION.** "It addeth learning to his lips." True eloquence does more than awaken mere emotion in the hearer. It instructs. Its spirit is in such vital alliance with eternal reality that its very sounds echo such truths as start the highest trains of thought. Who is the best religious teacher? Not the mere theologian, however vast his learning, Scriptural his theory, or perfect his language; but the Christ-loving man, however untutored his intellect and ungrammatical his speech. He dispenses the best "learning," learning which teaches men rightly to live and triumphantly to die. III. **IT IS A SOURCE OF SOUL-REFRESHMENT.** Honey was prized by those of old times, not only as a luxury to the palate, but also on account of its medicinal and salutary properties. To this there is an allusion here. The words express the twofold idea of pleasantness and of benefit. Many things have the one quality which have not the other. Many a poison is like honey, sweet to the taste, but instead of being "health to the bones," is laden with death. Words of true eloquence, indeed, fall as drops of honey on the soul, not only delicious to the taste but a tonic to the heart. (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 25. **There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.**—*A way of death*.—I. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF DUTY BY THE STANDARD OF THEIR OWN MORAL SENTIMENTS AND FEELINGS, AND THEREFORE THE WAY OF DEATH IS THOUGHT TO BE RIGHT.** 1. Sin first defiles the principles and then the conduct. 2. Sin has therefore brought down the ideal as well as the visible standard of duty among men. 3. Men thus rise and sink in their apprehensions of God's law, as they rise and sink in their own moral and spiritual attainments. 4. The more polluted, therefore, the man, the more will he think the way of death to be right. II. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF DUTY BY THE STANDARD OF COMMON PRACTICE AND OPINION, AND THEREFORE THE WAY OF DEATH IS THOUGHT TO BE RIGHT.** 1. The standard of the world is the average performances of duty. 2. This is the standard employed for most worldly or social purposes. It decides the reputation; the fitness for any society; the relationship; the situation. 3. Men identify this standard with the Divine, and determine by it eternal things. 4. Having stood the judgment of his fellows, man supposes that he can stand the judgment of God. III. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF DUTY, AND OF THE SAFETY OF A COURSE OF CONDUCT, ACCORDING TO THE BELIEF THAT THE DIVINE LAW-GIVER ACCEPTS OF COMPENSATION IN ONE DEPARTMENT FOR WRONGS DONE IN ANOTHER.** 1. Few love equally every form of sin. It does not consist with constitutional bias; outward circumstances; the pursuits of life; formed habits; the energy of the nature; the idols of the heart. 2. Many, therefore, attempt to balance their deficiency, and imagined excess, in duty. 3. This is impracticable (*Jas. ii. 10*). All is God's. The law is one. The loved sin is the test. IV. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF DUTY ACCORDING TO THE PRINCIPLE THAT WHATEVER TENDS TO PRESENT AND TEMPORAL ADVANTAGE IS DEFENSIBLE.** 1. Many appear to think that this world is altogether insulated. 2. They therefore confine their views to those objects of pursuit which it presents. 3. They suppose that they have acted their part well when they have escaped from the stage with approbation. 4. The way of such seems right, but the end thereof are the ways of death. V. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF THE SAFETY OF A COURSE ON THE PRINCIPLE THAT ALL IS WELL THAT ENDS WELL.** 1. This is a common and destructive perversion of truth. 2. The offers of grace are only for the present. 3. Every instance of rejection increases guilt, hardens the heart, and tends to bring about a death of indifference. VI. **MULTITUDES JUDGE OF DUTY ACCORDING AS IT BULKS IN THE EYE, AND THEREFORE THE WAY OF DEATH IS THOUGHT TO BE THE RIGHT WAY.** Illustrate from—1. The relative duties of the moral law. 2. Charities—religious societies. 3. The business of worship. It may be added that multitudes misinterpret Scripture. (*James Stewart*.) *A way may seem right, yet lead to hell*.—Imagine a large company travelling through a gloomy forest,

attended by a faithful and well-informed guide. The course becomes rugged and dreary, while on either hand ways open which are wide, verdant, and picturesque. The travellers wish to deviate, and perceiving their guide determined to pursue his own course they leave him. But they soon learn the way they have chosen is full of dangers. The allurements which seduced them vanish. This is a true picture of human life. We all have erred and gone astray; multitudes have perished irrecoverably. I. MARK THE MAN OF PLEASURE. "God is not in all his thoughts." He tells us that, as we are sure only of the present, we need seek nothing higher than the gratification of our natural desires; that religion may perhaps serve as a lamp through the dark valley and shadow of death, but cannot fail, on the bright eminence of life, to appear unnecessary and obtrusive. Such language opposes the whole tenor of that religion which inculcates faith, patience, contrition, and self-denial, and leads to the grosser habits of the drunkard and the fornicator, concerning whom an apostle declares, "they shall not inherit the kingdom of God." II. MARK THE THOUGHTLESS AND INDIFFERENT PERSON—the man who, being too indolent, too timid, or too superstitious to think and act for himself, borrows his system of doctrines and forms of worship from a long train of credulous ancestors or the opinions prevalent around him which are considered the most reputable. "I am right," he exclaims, "or all these are wrong. If I do err, it is in the company of those whom I have chosen as my perpetual companions." The way may seem right, it may save labour, and serve his present convenience; but death lurks at the end. The fool shall be destroyed, and his companions also; the destruction of transgressors shall be together. III. MARK THE FORMALIST. I mean one who is a strict observer of all the outward ceremonies of religion; the faithful adherent to her most minute forms. He divides the circle of the day; on one side he puts all his devotion, and thither he looks for comfort when conscience disturbs him for the follies so distinctly marked on the other side. He does not take with him into the world a principle which will enable him to resist temptation; and when he has fallen into sin he goes back to his formal services, thinking these may be a sufficient atonement. Or, perhaps, being habitually restrained within the bounds of decorum, he flatters himself that he is regenerated. Formality is a slow but effectual poison; it is a dead and putrid carcass laid upon the altar of Him who demands a "living sacrifice." IV. MARK THE SELF-CONFIDENT MAN. None that I have mentioned are in greater danger. 1. There are rich men who delude themselves with the vain conceit that silver and gold, and the things which silver and gold procure, render them independent of God. Not all their splendid array, and sumptuous fare, and bowing menials, and princely estates, will save them from lifting up their eyes, being in torments. 2. Men of intellectual capacity are peculiarly prone to self-confidence. It were wicked to disparage reason; but may it not be overrated? It is a guide, but surely not through regions it has never visited. It is a luminary: so likewise is the moon, and so are the stars; but can we, therefore, dispense with the sun? 3. There are the self-confident who trust in their fancied rectitude. V. MARK THE SUBJECT OF PARTIAL CONVICTION, the man who mistakes remorse for repentance, and a state of alarm for the unfailing pledge of salvation. They have mourned, and watched, and been oppressed with dread. At length, however, they became tranquil. They were received with due form into a Christian society. But they soon settle down into heartless regularity; their conscience keeps pace with their profession, till at length they come to regard it as a sin to doubt respecting their good estate, and are offended at every faithful admonition. But the gospel has had no practical and saving efficacy upon their hearts. Woe unto them who are thus at ease in Zion, who despise the warning contained in the text! VI. IS THERE A BETTER WAY—a way which leadeth to LIFE? Jesus the Son of God has opened it; He suffered, bled, and died that He might secure it for us. He is the way of pardon, of peace, and of salvation. He is the way that leads to heaven and glory. (*R. Elton, D.D.*) *Mistaken views:—* This is the age of specialists; and one of the most important departments is that which deals with the eye and its defects. We hear in this connection of heredity; the different effects of town and country life, with their near and remote objects; the results of overwork and unhealthy surroundings, &c. So with the inward eye and the vision of the moral life. Here also we have short-sightedness, discrepancy of focus, stealthy cataract; the inflammation that makes light an agony; the eye that exaggerates and sees double, and that which makes everything seem insignificant and far away; and there is an eye that dotes on the dark end of the spectrum. I. HONEST AND DISHONEST ERROR. The text confines

our attention to honest derangement of vision, or what claims to be such. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man." The seat of the trouble is in the man, not in the way. The way remains where it is, and he chooses it and walks into it. II. **INHERENT DIFFICULTIES.** Many of our troubles in moral vision arise from the inability to see distance. Some things are present, others are past. It is easy to put paint on paper, but it is aerial perspective that makes a picture. Again, errors of judgment are due to the fact that we give fixed measurements to things that are themselves in motion: growing larger or smaller, advancing or receding. Closely connected with this is the weak eye for angles and the feeble sense of proportion. If we could only see it, there is a difference between self and society, between party and mankind, between time and eternity. III. **DECISION AND INDECISION.** Under given conditions a diminished area always makes a brighter disc. Microscopic objects have no mist. Downrightness is always a desirable thing, especially for emergencies that come suddenly and only once. It means health to its possessor and safety to those who know what to expect. It draws to itself unattached particles, and has an incisive momentum that bruises into softer substances. "Yes" and "No" are great civilisers. But clearness that is gained by exclusion may cost too much. When the narrowing process begins it goes on, and self is always the most tempting centre; in fact, the only terminus. It is sometimes difficult for robust natures to see it, but strength of conviction does not necessarily mean correspondence with fact. And fact is the chief thing. IV. **THE CULPABILITY OF MISTAKEN VIEWS.** Where and when is the error found blameworthy? Not directly in the region of intellect and its knowledge, but in that of the will and its preferences and energies. The individual error becomes a process and the process becomes a system. There is first light defied and then light debased. This belongs to us, not to circumstance. "Business is business"—how much that is made to cover and countenance! "Others do it, and why should not I?" The same man will always say with regard to any loved indulgence, "This is safe for me, and what have I to do with others?" If we pass from difficulties of the personal life we find the same obscurity or obliquity of view in things that affect communities, nations, and Churches. There was the slavery question, over which the British Parliament struggled for many years, and for which America poured out its blood. So with the great temperance question of to-day. (*G. M. Mackie, M.A.*) *The seeming right:*—Our difficulty in life is often with things that seem to be right. Where they are obviously wrong there is no need for hesitation, but where probabilities are in their favour we must pause and consider. How far does our own experience confirm the doctrine of the text? 1. Does not the way of self-protection seem to be right? To a certain extent it is right. Pressed unduly it becomes practical atheism. 2. Does not the way of physical persecution for truth's sake seem to be right? If a man is teaching error why not burn him, or otherwise put a forcible end to his ministry? 3. Does not the way of self-enjoyment seem right. 4. Does not the way of judging by appearances seem right? What can be better? What can be simpler? 5. Does not the way of self-redemption seem right? Is it not brave and spirited to say that we take our own recovery into our own hands? This is the fatal error of mankind. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in Me is thy help." Application: 1. Lean not to thine own understanding. The coiled scorpion may be mistaken for an egg. 2. Seek higher than human counsel. Be religious. Put thy whole life into the keeping of God. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." Distrust appearances. Even when the way seems right stand still and commune with Heaven. "Except Thy presence go with me, carry me not up hence." (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Sincere belief no safeguard:*—See that man who is just too late, or the other, who was sitting quietly at his breakfast when he heard the departing signal. Neither can believe he is in fault. Oh, no! his watch is right. The conductor hurried the train; the agent's watch is out of order. 1. There has been error. His watch was wrong, after all. He did not take care to set it by the true standard. Men fail of success because they adopt wrong principles. They blame the Bible, the Church, the ministry; anything, anybody, everything, everybody, rather than self. 2. Our sincere belief that we are right will not save us. God has a certain fixed, and immutable, and holy law. If we follow his teachings we shall be safe; but if we follow our own notions He makes no provision for our faults; we are left to suffer. 3. There are favoured times for obtaining God's favour. (*Christian Treasury.*) *Beware of imperceptible currents:*—The currents of the sea are found to run in all directions, east, west, north, south, being formed

by various causes—the prominence of the shores, the narrowness of the straits, the variations of the wind, and the inequalities at the bottom. These currents are of the most material consequence to the mariner, without a knowledge of which he could never succeed. It often happens that when a ship gets unknowingly into one of these everything seems to go forward with success, the mariners suppose themselves every hour approaching their wished-for port, the wind fills their sails, and the ship's prow seems to divide the water, but at last by miserable experience they find that instead of going forward they have been all the time receding. The busyness of currents, therefore, makes a considerable article in navigation, and the direction of their stream and their rapidity has been carefully set down. (*Scientific Illustrations.*)

Ver. 27. An ungodly man diggeth up evil.—Digging up evil.—An ungodly man is “a son of Belial.” In the expression “diggeth up evil” two ideas may be included. I. **TAKING PAINS TO DEVISE IT.** We dig and search for treasure in a mine, or where we fancy it lies concealed; thus the wicked man does in regard to evil. It is his treasure, that on which he sets his heart, and for it, as for treasure, he digs and searches, aye, often deep and long. He is specially laborious and persevering, when any one chances to have become the object of his pique or malice. Marvellous is the assiduity with which he then strains every nerve to produce mischief, plodding and plotting for it, mining and undermining, exploring in every direction, often where no one could think of but himself, and, with savage delight, exulting in the discovery of aught that can be made available for his diabolical purpose. II. **TAKING PAINS TO REVIVE IT, AFTER IT HAS BEEN BURIED AND FORGOTTEN.** He goes down into the very grave of old quarrels, brings them up afresh; puts new life into them; wakes up grudges that had long slept; and sets people by the ears again who had abandoned their enmities, and had for years been living in reconciliation and peace. The son of Belial, in relation to evil, is like one in quest of some mine of coal or precious metal. He examines his ground, and wherever he discovers any hopeful symptoms on the surface, he proceeds to drill, and bore, and excavate. The slightest probability of success will be enough for his encouragement to toil and harass himself night and day until he can make something out of it. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 31. The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.—On the duties and consolations of the aged:—To every age there belongs a distinct propriety of behaviour. There arises from it a series of duties peculiar to itself. I. **SOME COUNSELS CONCERNING THE ERRORS WHICH ARE MOST INCIDENT TO THE AGED.** 1. Almost all of them may be traced up to the feebleness and distresses peculiar to that time of life. Life is then contracted within a narrow and barren circle. Year after year steals somewhat away from their store of comfort, deprives them of some of their ancient friends, blunts some of their powers of sensation, or incapacitates them for some function of life. The aged should consider that to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience is as much their duty as is that of the young to resist the temptations of youthful pleasure. Though querulous temper may be regarded as a natural infirmity, no apology can be made for that peevish disgust at the manners, and that malignant censure of the enjoyments of the young, which is sometimes found to accompany declining years. Nothing can be more unjust than to take offence at others on account of their partaking of pleasures which it is past your time to enjoy. 2. One of the vices of old age, which appears the most unaccountable, is that covetous attachment to worldly interest with which it is often charged. As vigour of body and mind declines, timidity may be expected to increase. Hence the old sometimes over-value riches, as securing them from danger. But though their apprehensions may justify a cautious frugality, they can by no means excuse a sordid avarice. As increasing years debilitate the body, so they weaken force, and diminish the warmth of affections. Chilled by the hand of time, the heart loses that tender sensibility with which it once entered into the concerns and sorrows of others. II. **THE DUTIES WHICH PECULIARLY BELONG TO OLD AGE.** 1. A timely retreat from the world. It is only in the shade that the virtues of old age can flourish. By this is not meant a total cessation from worldly enjoyment. The aged should loosen their communication with active life. 2. They should quit the pursuit of such pleasures as are unsuitable to their years. Cheerfulness, in old age, is graceful. It is the natural concomitant of virtue. But the cheerfulness of age is widely

different from the levity of youth. 3. A material part of the duty of the aged consists in studying to be useful to the race who are to succeed them : to impart to the young the fruit of their long experience ; to instruct them in the proper conduct, and to warn them of the various dangers of life. 4. Let the aged not forget those religious employments which their own state particularly requires. III. THE CONSOLATIONS WHICH BELONG TO OLD AGE. Such as arise from patient submission ; from the respect rendered by others ; from the many enjoyments that remain ; from the love and service of those bound to them in family relationships ; from the favour of God. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The duties of the aged* :—Long life all men desire : and yet to most no part of life seems to have much happiness in it ; and that part least of all, to which living long brings them. And yet, if life is a blessing, long life must be a greater blessing. Old age may be both honourable and happy. I. WHAT ASSISTANCE VIRTUE AND PIETY CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS MAKING OLD AGE HONOURABLE AND HAPPY. 1. Laying proper foundations in the former part. Neglect of right conduct in our early years is the main reason that our advanced ones are despicable and miserable. See the influence of youthful irregularities ; idle expenses ; neglect of attaining knowledge ; early indulgence of ill-temper ; forgetting the Creator in the days of youth. "Wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age." 2. Directing to proper behaviour when old age comes. Avoiding the faults to which men are then peculiarly subject. Such are artfulness and insensibility, selfishness and avarice. A mean and penurious behaviour. Sparing and accumulating, without reason or use, is both sin and folly. Another fault is, giving improperly and inequitably what they give, whether in their lives or at their deaths. The aged are sometimes imposed upon by artful people, who supplant those naturally dependent on them. Or they let little piques and preferences influence them, contrary to the justest motives and their own former kind intentions. Another danger of the aged is ill-temper. Sometimes a consequence of loss of strength, and bodily pain. 1. The aged should therefore anxiously endeavour to preserve a composed and even mind. 2. To practise the duties to which they are peculiarly bound. One is serious reflection on their past conduct, accompanied with earnest endeavours to undo, as far as they can, whatever they have done amiss, and rectify the errors of their busier and warmer days. The more piously and virtuously men have lived, the less necessity will they have in their old age for so minute a review of their ways ; but then they will receive the greatest, the most seasonable comfort from it. Another duty is that of religious exercises and contemplations. Another duty is to imprint, on those who come within the sphere of their influence, the same right sentiments of life and conduct which they have acquired for themselves. II. THE DIRECTIONS WHICH VIRTUE AND RELIGION FURNISH ARE EFFECTUAL TO THE DESIRED END. As long as persons in years can enjoy anything, the regard paid by those about them to their established character must support and revive them to a great degree. Those who have proceeded so far in life with innocence must feel from it the highest joy ; they who have truly repented cannot fail to be sensible of much consolation. Recollection of their life associations and experiences must be a fruitful source of improving amusement to them, and relating them an acceptable entertainment and instruction to others. (*T. Secker.*) *On the relative duties of the aged and the young* :—We contemplate the aged with sentiments that might be profitable to us, and that are likely to make some impression on the heart. But we cannot consider the "hoary head a crown of glory" unless it be stored with that wisdom which time and reflection are hourly instilling into the mind, in order to wean us from the world, and prepare us for heaven. A young person has reason to expect from the aged information. They have long sojourned in the land of discipline. To the aged the young apply, as to experienced travellers, that can direct their course through stormy seas or perplexing wilds. The aged cannot acquit themselves of negligence and folly if it should appear that they are unable to warn youth of unexpected dangers, and to point out the path that leads to safety. Life has been of little advantage to him who derives no wisdom from its variety, and no virtue from its trials. It is a man's duty to become practically wise, through a right use of the experiences of life. It should be the care of the aged to communicate to the young only that which is good. Too often they only inculcate a sort of worldly prudence, and selfish kind of knowledge, which chokes the seed of every growing virtue, and disqualifies the child of immortality for heaven. Another moral excellence, which it is the duty of the aged to acquire, is a proper regulation of the passions. Time, and often-repeated experience of sorrow, will often accomplish, in

this respect, what reason and religion have attempted in vain. The experience of life should produce settled habits of virtue; it should establish some determined pursuit of good; it should show that life has not been squandered away without improvement. From a proper regulation of the passions would arise that complacent dignity, which is the characteristic of true greatness; and that charity and humility, that mildness and forbearance, which are the ornaments of true religion. It is so ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that the most effectual means of good should, by the perversion of sin, become the most dangerous instruments of evil. There is nothing more pernicious to the morals of youth, or so likely to spread depravity through the different orders of society, as a vicious old man. A number of minor vices and imperfections of character often deprive the aged of honour, and prevent them from being extensively useful. There is sometimes a severity in their conversation, and a moroseness in their disposition, which spoil their influence on the young. Age should be averse to violence and disorder of every kind. The tempests of the mind should be no more; neither the emotions of anger, the murmurings of discontent, nor the bitterness of wrath, should disturb the calm evening of our days. The aged should avoid that querulousness and discontent which they are so often apt to indulge. The religion which administers comfort in age must be cultivated in the days of our youth. It is a mockery of devotion to serve that great and gracious God in the moment of fear only who requires that His service should be perfect freedom. (*J. Hewlett, B.D.*)

The way of righteousness:—I. DESCRIBE THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. Righteousness here includes the whole rule of our duty towards God and man. Way, in a moral sense, is expressive of a person's course of behaviour, or his ordinary conduct. The way of righteousness is a course of behaviour or conduct prescribed by the Divine Word, that perfect rule of righteousness. It is the way wherein Christ walked. On it rests the Divine approbation. A godly life is neither a light matter nor easy attainment. All who walk in this way must deny themselves. In this way holiness is visible. "It shall be called the way of holiness." II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN BEING FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS? It is to be found accustoming oneself to obey the Divine commands, being employed in the practice of religion, and of all virtue. It is a way wherein a person usually walks; that which is his ordinary practice. A man is denominated by the general tenor of his conversation. Being found in a way implies that the conduct of the professor is taken notice of by others. "Only the person who is following after righteousness can properly be said to be found in the way of it."

III. THE BEAUTY, HONOUR, AND DIGNITY WHICH ARE UPON AN AGED DISCIPLE OF CHRIST. There is the beauty of true wisdom and understanding age. Spiritual wisdom, the graces of the Holy Spirit, are ornaments far more honourable than chains of gold. Such disciples are honoured now with the approbation of heaven. Use this subject—1. To correct mistakes often made concerning religion. 2. To encourage those who desire to walk in this way. 3. To exhort to constancy those who have, through grace, entered the way of righteousness. 4. To awaken all to a sense of their duty. They ought to enter and walk in this way. (*Thomas Flower.*)

The honour of aged piety:—It is a dictate of natural conscience, that reverence is due to the aged merely on account of their age. The general practice of the heathen, both ancient and modern, confirms and illustrates this dictate of nature. And the Scriptures command us to show respect to the aged. When wisdom and piety accompany old age, it is peculiarly venerable. I. ON WHAT ACCOUNTS AGED PIETY IS PECULIARLY HONOURABLE. 1. It began early. This must be supposed. It is implied in the expression "found" in the way of righteousness. Such a one hath been long walking in that way. Where persons have, with good Obadiah, feared the Lord from their youth, and walked in His fear all their days, they claim peculiar respect. They have indeed lived—lived to a good purpose. This will command honour from others. 2. Their piety is founded on knowledge and experience. Knowledge is gained by observation, reflection, reading, and converse. Our stock of knowledge naturally increaseth with advancing years. It will be more or less according to men's natural abilities, education, and pains taken in improving their understandings. The aged are not always wise, but they frequently are so, and always much wiser than younger persons of equal capacities, advantages, and applications. Aged saints are peculiarly honourable, because their knowledge is of the best kind, and applied to the best purposes. Their wisdom is an ornament of grace to them. 3. The piety of aged Christians is approved and steadfast. Many put on an appearance of piety to serve some secular purpose. But the piety of the aged Christian has been severely tested and proved, in the long and severe

experiences of life. An aged saint is like a tree arrived at maturity, that, having brought forth fruit many years, in its season, stood many storms, and taken root the faster, is known by all around to be very valuable. He is rooted in the faith, grounded and settled. 4. The piety of the aged is attended with great usefulness. God is glorified when Christians bring forth much fruit: and in proportion to men's usefulness will be their honour. The piety of an aged Christian is much to the glory of God, as it shows the excellency of His dispensations. Aged saints are useful to mankind. They shine as lights in a dark world, and produce a secret veneration for religion in the hearts of those who will not be persuaded to pursue it. They are living witnesses to the kindness of God's providence, the riches of His grace, and His faithfulness to His promises. They are patterns of patience, contentment, and thankfulness. Their prayers are serviceable to the world and to the Church. They are capable of giving excellent counsel. 5. Their piety renders them peculiarly ripe for glory. Graces shine brighter through the wrinkles that deform the countenance. II. USEFUL INSTRUCTIONS FROM THIS SUBJECT. 1. The hoary head is a disgrace and reproach to an old sinner. 2. Aged saints ought to be revered. Let us speak of them and to them with the greatest respect; tenderly pity, and patiently bear with, their weaknesses, and consider the excellences of their characters, as casting a lustre even over their infirmities. 3. Aged saints should proceed in the ways of righteousness, with thankfulness and courage. 4. It is the wisdom of young persons to enter on the ways of righteousness. There is very little hope for those who forget God in their youthful days. (*J. Orton.*) *The distinguished honour of aged piety*:—There is no beauty or comeliness like that of holiness. Nothing tends more to adorn or recommend a person. Here holiness is presented under the notion of a most excellent and comely ornament which suits persons of any age or condition. Some think these words are a proposal of the most likely course men can take to prolong their days. Others think that the duty of the aged is here prescribed. We take it thus: "Then is the hoary head more especially an ornament and glory when it is found in the way of righteousness." There is somewhat venerable in old age. 1. The knowledge of the aged may be supposed to be very considerable, by reason of the long time they have had for acquiring it. 2. The virtue and sincerity of the aged is more tried and approved than of those who have but lately set out and engaged in religion. 3. As the virtue and holiness of the aged is more tried and approved through their long standing, so it is more considerable in the degree and measure. There is a double improvement which we may suppose Christians to make, the one by becoming more confirmed and established in their holy religion, and the other by their abounding more in the fruits of righteousness. 4. Such persons are eminent instruments of bringing glory to God and of usefulness to His Church. The more conspicuous the power of goodness in such people, the more God is glorified by them. 5. The hoary head that is found in the way of righteousness is ripe for glory and just ready to enter into it. Infer—(1) The unreasonableness of the contempt that young persons sometimes show to those who are old, even mocking at their infirmities. (2) The reasonableness of the apostolic rule, "Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." (3) Persons should make preparation for the honour and comfort of old age, even by choosing the ways of righteousness while they are young. (*W. Pierce.*) *Christian experience*:—Some of the distinguishing features in the experience of aged disciples. 1. They have a greater knowledge and more enlarged experience—knowledge of the Scriptures, and of God's providence, and of the world. They have learned much in the school of affliction. 2. Another feature in the experience of the fathers in Christ is their deadness to the world. Years have taught them to moderate their estimate of what the world can do for them. They sit loose from the world, knowing that they must soon leave it. 3. Heavenly-mindedness is another feature. This appears in their contemplating passing events, chiefly in their reference to the spiritual and eternal world, and in the interest they take in what has a special reference to the Church, and in spending their time in retirement and meditation. 4. Humility is another feature. In looking back over the way in which God has led them they see much to keep them humble. 5. A calm, composed, and peaceful state of mind is another feature. They are now, in great measure, freed from the turbulence of unruly passions within. 6. Their being in a waiting posture is another feature. They resign business details to younger hands. 7. A joyful anticipation of the blessedness and glory awaiting them is another feature: This is intended to present a high standard of the distinguishing features in the experience of far-

advanced Christians. (*George Muirhead, D.D.*) *Honourable old age*.—I. WHAT

IS THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS in which the old man is supposed to be found? 1. It is supposed that the old man has spent the preceding part of his life in devotional exercises. 2. It is supposed that the old man has, in the preceding part of his life, practised self-control, and regulated his pursuits and pleasures by the discipline of religion. It is the remembrance of his good deed which awakens our esteem and love. 3. It is supposed that the old man has been a useful member of society. To those insignificant beings who have contributed nothing to the benefit of mankind we owe, when they arrive at old age, not honour, but pity.

II. THAT HONOUR IS DUE TO THE OLD MAN WHO IS FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

1. He is a man, the sincerity of whose religion is placed beyond suspicion by the long trial which it has sustained. 2. He is a man who, through Divine assistance, has fulfilled the end of his creation. 3. He is a man who is qualified, by the wisdom which he has acquired, to be the instructor and guide of his inferiors in years. 4. He is a man who stands high in the favour of God. 5. He is a man who is about to receive the reward of his labours. (*John Dick, D.D.*)

The glory of aged piety.—1. That righteousness is conducive to old age. This is a fact sustained both by philosophy and history. 2. That piety is conducive to honour.

I. IT IS THE GLORY OF SPIRITUAL RIPPENESS. There is something glorious in maturation. The seed ripened into an autumnal crop, the youth ripened into mature manhood, the student ripened into the accomplished scholar, are all objects of admiration. In an old saint there is a truly glorious ripeness. There you have all the seeds of truth and holiness as sown by holy teachers, cultured by experience, fostered by the sunbeam and the showers of God, tried and strengthened in their roots by the storms of adversity, hanging in rich clusters on the boughs ready to be gathered in. "Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in in his season" (Job v. 26).

II. IT IS THE GLORY OF SPIRITUAL COMMAND. Even Egypt's proud despot bowed before it. "And Joseph brought in Jacob his father and set him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (Gen. xlvii. 7-10). Samuel was an old saint when he died (1 Sam. xxv. 1; 2 Chron. xxiv. 15, 16).

III. IT IS THE GLORY OF SPIRITUAL PROSPECTS. "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace," &c. We conclude with the utterance of a modern author: "As ripe fruit is sweeter than green fruit, so is age sweeter than youth, provided the youth were grafted into Christ. As harvest-time is a brighter time than seed-time, so is age brighter than youth; that is, if youth were a seed-time for good. As the completion of a work is more glorious than the beginning, so is age more glorious than youth; that is, if the foundation of the work of God were laid in youth. As sailing into port is happier than the voyage, so is age happier than youth; that is, when the voyage from youth is made with Christ at the helm." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

The old age of the righteous, honourable.—This is a just aphorism and beautifully expressed. Old age is, in a figurative and poetical manner, described by one of its concomitants, and by one which does not directly imply any of its infirmities, but rather is in its very appearance venerable.

I. THE OLD AGE OF THE VIRTUOUS IS HONOURABLE ON ACCOUNT OF THE LIFE WHICH HAS PRECEDED IT. It is the termination of a wise, a well-spent, and a useful life. Such a life reflects great glory on the person who has accomplished it.

1. In a religious and virtuous old man we behold one who has long been exposed to the temptations of the world and has overcome them. 2. A virtuous old age is the termination of a life which has been filled up with worthy and useful actions.

II. THE OLD AGE OF THE VIRTUOUS IS HONOURABLE IN ITSELF.

1. The character which a pious and virtuous old person exhibits to our view is that of goodness, genuine, improved, and useful; of all characters the most respectable. This character was acquired by the conduct of the whole life, and therefore naturally turns our eye backward to its course; but when we consider it as now possessed in its maturity, and actuating the aged person in all his motions, it is, in itself, and without regard to the life which preceded it, a glorious ornament.

2. In old age virtue is naturally accompanied by wisdom and prudence, derived from long experience.

III. THE OLD AGE OF GOOD MEN IS HONOURABLE IN RESPECT OF THE PROSPECTS WHICH ATTEND IT. These are the principal causes of that firmness and cheerfulness under their infirmities which procures them reverence; and these reflect honour upon them in other ways. Old age is the termination of this mortal life; but to good men it is the immediate prelude to immortality. A person who early began to follow holiness, and has persisted in it to an advanced age, is ripe for the glory and happiness of heaven. His hoary head is a natural emblem and the direct forerunner of that everlasting crown which he is ready to receive.

Practical reflections: 1. This subject gives us a striking view of the excellence of religion, of the importance of true goodness, fit to recommend it to our love and to engage us in the practice of it. It alone can preserve us innocent and blameless in our younger and gayer days and render us useful in our maturity. 2. It instructs the young in the duty which they owe to their elders. Their years give them a superiority, their experience gives them prudence, and, if they have exercised themselves unto godliness, the length of their exercise has rendered them proficient in holiness: these are all natural motives to respect, esteem, and honour. The subject of this discourse suggests to the young instructions likewise of a more extensive nature; it urges them to begin early a religious and holy life. Would you establish your claim to honour when you shall arrive at old age? Be good betimes: begin early, and persist steadily. 3. In the subject of this discourse the old are particularly interested. Are any of you, ye aged, yet strangers to the way of righteousness? Your hoary head is your disgrace. At every age vice is the greatest folly, for at every age men may be hurried in a moment to suffer the punishment of vice; but in old age vice is perfect madness, for the hoary sinner must quickly be summoned to his doom. How dreadfully dangerous is your state! (*Alex. Gerard, D.D.*) *Ideal age*:—I. ITS CHARACTERISTICS. 1. Established faith. (1) His saving trust is perfected. (2) His theological convictions are consolidated. 2. Beautiful spirit. (1) Devoutness. (2) Humility. (3) Patience. (4) Cheerfulness. (5) Liberality. (6) Wisdom. (7) Resignation. (8) Hopefulness. 3. Continued usefulness. (1) Sympathy. (2) Counsel. (3) Prayer. (4) Work. II. *IRS GLORY*. 1. The glory of rich experience. Has learnt among other lessons—(1) To believe in the love of God in spite of all contrary appearances. (2) To always do right irrespective of possible consequences. (3) To be kind to all, but to place confidence only in the select few. (4) To sit loose to earthly possessions. (5) To receive advice, but act with an independent judgment. (6) To seek right conclusions, uninfluenced by conventional notions. (7) To put the best probable construction on doubtful actions. (8) To make allowances for the infirmities of others. 2. The glory of pleasing memories. (1) Memories of blessings thankfully received. (3) Memories of work faithfully done. 3. The glory of deserved honour. 4. The glory of thrilling hopes. (1) Hope of a happy departure from earth. (2) Hope of a blessed existence in paradise to the end of time. (3) Hope of a glorious resurrection to eternal life. (*T. Baron.*)

Ver. 32. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.—*Christian heroism*:—I. WHAT IS IT TO RULE THE SPIRIT? Spirit is used sometimes for the thoughts of the mind, the passions of the heart, the emotions of sense, phantoms of imagination, and illusions of concupiscence. To rule the spirit is never to suffer one's self to be prejudiced by false ideas, always to see things in their true point of view, to regulate our hatred and our love, our desires and our inactivity, exactly according to the knowledge we have obtained after mature deliberation that objects are worthy of our esteem or deserve our aversion that they are worth obtaining or proper to be neglected. Consider man—1. In regard to his natural dispositions. Man finds himself the slave of his heart, instead of being the master of it. He finds himself indisposed to truth and virtue, and conciliatory to vice and falsehood. Who does not feel in himself and observe in others a resistance to the practice of virtue? By virtue understand an universal disposition of an intelligent soul to devote itself to order, and to regulate its conduct as order requires. To avoid vice is to desist from everything contrary to order, from slander and anger, from indolence and voluptuousness, and so on. We bring into the world propensities hostile and fatal to such obligations. Some of these are in the body, and some are in the mind. As we feel in our constitution obstacles to virtue and propensities to vice, so we perceive also inclinations to error and obstacles to truth. Every vice, every irregular passion, includes this error, that a man who gratifies his passion is happier than he who restrains and moderates it. The disposition of mind indicated by the term "ruling the spirit" supposes labour, constraint, and exercise. A man who would rule his spirit must recreate himself. 2. In regard to surrounding objects. Society is composed of many enemies, who seem to be taking pains to increase those difficulties which our natural dispositions oppose against truth and virtue. Everywhere around us are false judgments, errors, mistakes, and prejudices—prejudices of birth, education, country, religion, friendship, trade or profession, and of fortune. What efforts must a man make to hold his soul in

perpetual equilibrium, to maintain himself against so many prejudices! As the men around us fascinate us by their errors, so they decoy us into vice by their example. To resist example we must incessantly oppose those natural inclinations which urge us to imitation. To resist example we must love virtue for virtue's sake. 3. In regard to the habits which man has contracted. Most men have done more acts of vice than of virtue; consequently we contribute by our way of living to join to the depravity of nature that which comes from exercise and habit. What a task, when we endeavour to prevent the return of ideas which for many years our minds have revolved! II. PROVE THE TRUTH OF THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. By one who takes a city Solomon means a man who lives upon victories and conquests—a hero in the world's sense. He that ruleth his spirit discovers more fortitude, more magnanimity, and more courage. Compare the worldly with the Christian hero in four particulars. 1. The motives which animate them. 2. The exploits they perform. 3. The enemies they attack. 4. The rewards they obtain. The enemy whom the Christian combats is his own heart; for he is required to turn his arms against himself. He must actually deny himself. Let us religiously abide by our principle. The duty of an intelligent soul is to adhere to truth, and to practise virtue. We are born with a disinclination to both. Let us not be dismayed with the greatness of the task of ruling our spirit. "Greater is He that is in us, than he that is in the world." Grace comes to the aid of nature. Prayer gains strength by exercise. The passions, after having been tyrants, become slaves in their turn. The danger and pain of battle vanish when the eyes get sight of conquest. How inconceivably beautiful is victory then! (*J. Saurin.*) *Self-respect and self-control*.—Above all conquests of states and cities is the greater conquest of self. Greater is the man who conquers himself, who rules his own spirit, and brings his whole being under the supremacy of will, than he who takes a city—greater in his character, deeds, results. The outcome of a life depends on the answer to two questions—what a man thinks of himself; what he does with himself. The two closely-related and all essential conditions of genuine manhood are self-respect and self-control. I. SELF-RESPECT involves a sense of the dignity which belongs to humanity: a sense of one's individuality, and the consequent maintenance of one's selfhood. Distinction, in such a world as this, is gained, not by following the multitude, but by standing aside in your own personality while the vulgar crowd sweep by. As a reason for conduct, "They all do it" is a cheap and silly excuse. There comes with a sense of dignity and individuality an insight into the significance of a man's life, and an overmastering thought of its measureless responsibilities, and a full impression of the sacredness of life. There is too much that is great and sacred in man's nature and destiny to permit him to misuse a life so richly endowed. Such self-respect is in no way self-conceit. II. SELF-CONTROL, OR SELF-GOVERNMENT. If such is our being, there must be some strong power to preside over it. "I must be my own master," the self-respecting man says. Then he will want to know the scope of the government to be maintained. It must seek a man's own highest interests, the real interests of others, and the honour of God; and it must fulfil all obligations arising from this highest of relationships. This a first law: nothing deleterious to character—either of our own or that of another—shall ever be permitted. But true self-government does not stop with self-restraint. It demands the right exercise of every power to the fullest measure of ability. It involves the highest self-development, and the largest happiness to others. III. THE FRUITS OF SELF-RESPECT AND SELF-GOVERNMENT. 1. All the higher parts of a man's being are ennobled and given their rightful sway; all the lower are rightly held in subjection. The conscience becomes supreme. All the moral powers are in full development and play. The will is chief executive, and God is an active power, a real factor in practical life. The entire man is at his best. 2. Thus is realised the proper end of all true education. 3. This quality of self-control pre-eminently prepares us for great emergencies. Self-respect is the early form in which greatness appears; it is our practical perception of the Deity in man.

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone, lead life to sovereign power."

(*C. H. Payne, D.D., LL.D.*) *On the government of the temper*.—Important is an early discipline of the passions, and a steady attention to the government of our conduct. Such are the frailties and imperfections of man, that even his virtues are often blended with corresponding vices, and are always united with errors congenial

to them. Previous to the cultivation of good dispositions is the duty of guarding against evil ones. The evil now dealt with is what self-love would be content to call a foible, or a mere natural infirmity; but religion always associates it with folly and condemns it as sin. I mean a peevish temper and an irritable disposition. Consider this—I. AS THE SOURCE OF CONTINUAL UNHAPPINESS TO OURSELVES AND OTHERS. The ills and vexations of life are of themselves sufficiently numerous, without cherishing such dispositions in our own bosoms as are calculated to give them additional violence. The best tempers will indeed sometimes be ruffled. And the good cannot always resist the encroachments of passion. But the passionate man magnifies every trifle that thwarts him into a real evil. But no one ever harboured in his bosom the gloomy passions of anger, hatred, and revenge, without feeling a pang that corroded his own heart, while he wished to disturb the peace of others. Repeated hours of vexation and sorrow, which sprang wholly from internal disorder or irritable passions, has led some, from mere self-love, to inure their minds to discipline at a more advanced season of life. Such are the effects of an irascible temper, that the dearest blessings and the most rational satisfactions which this life can afford are often lost by it. However careful we may be in disciplining our own minds, we cannot hope to live secure against the wild and unprovoked attacks of anger, or the hourly vexations of peevishness. And those who are contented to live under the loose dominion of the passions must be in constant fear of saying or doing something to-day which they may be truly ashamed of to-morrow. And the passionate man may justly apprehend dreadful consequences. He is in danger of every species of injustice and every degree of guilt. The temper to evil is cherished within his own breast. II. THE PEEVISH TEMPER IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THAT FRAME OF MIND WHICH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST TEACHES AND REQUIRES US TO CULTIVATE. Our Lord requires of His disciples a holy disposition, which may well be regarded as the good ground in which the seed of every virtue will grow up to perfection. And He requires of us also works of charity and neighbourly love, mutual forbearance, long-suffering, and steady perseverance in the course of every duty. The efficacy of piety and prayer will, in a great measure, be destroyed by an evil disposition. We must cultivate habits of religion as well as of virtue. (*J. Hewlett, B.D.*) *The government of our passions, especially anger*.—The text may be resolved into this proposition—that the private rule or government over our passions is far more honourable than any other rule or dominion whatever. The passion of anger is specially mentioned in the text. The excellency of dominion over this passion appears—1. Because it carries us to a nearer resemblance of the Divine nature than any other power or authority. The great excellency of our natures, or our likeness and conformity to God, does not consist in any one single perfection, but requires a great variety to complete it. Those are the noblest perfections that most improve and better the temper of our minds. The right temper of our minds depends on the regularity of our passions. A just government over these is therefore a much greater perfection than might and power. The great glory of God Himself is that His eternal mind is always acted by eternal reason, without passion or resentment. He delights and glories in this, that He is slow to anger. 2. Because it gives us a reputation of greater wisdom and understanding. Solomon always links together a man of temper and a man of understanding. Take one branch of understanding, that which goes by the name of prudence and discretion. Prudence, as a moral virtue, is wholly employed about the private conduct and government of our own selves. To exercise rule over others is more of an art and policy than a moral virtue. There is nothing that deserves the name of prudence but what relates to a man's self, and the private economy within himself. A wise man is the greatest self-lover, in a true sense, and prudence as well as charity begins at home. No man can be fitted to command others that never made the experiment of governing himself. The art of quieting our spirits is the noblest piece of wisdom in relation to our own selves. 3. Because it bespeaks more true courage and bravery than any other conquest. It is the true fortitude and bravery of the mind to quell those passions that are enemies to our reason. A fierce, ungovernable temper only shows the greatness of a man's passion, not the greatness of his mind. The greatness of a man's mind as much consists in the command over its passions as that of a prince in the command over his subjects. So great is the bravery of conquering one single passion, it leaves always an honourable impression of a great mind. 4. Because it affords the truest freedom and liberty. If the right notion of human liberty were an entire exemption from the will of a Superior, the advantages of liberty would lie on the side of might and

power. But this account of liberty is false. By liberty we mean that inward freedom and vigour of mind that consist in the absolute command over its own acts; in the free and undisturbed exercise of its powers. This implies the free exercise of our reason, the ruling of our spirits, and the subjection of our passions. Where there is the most perfect reason, there is the most perfect liberty. It is thought by some that those have the best pretensions to liberty that are left absolutely at large, and nowise confined to the commands of reason. But that is the idea of human passions, not of human reason. Where is there any such thing as human liberty without the observance of rules and laws? 5. Because it gives us more ease and quiet. Our passions naturally break our repose and quiet. There is some trouble and difficulty in conquering a passion, but there is infinitely greater in being a slave to it. Whether we are concerned in bearing the evils or enjoying the good things of this world, we find a mighty difference in point of ease and quiet betwixt the conduct of our reason and the misgovernment of our passions. The main spring of the passion of anger is an opinion of our being slighted and despised, or a fancy of some indignity that is offered to us. Now this fancy and opinion, just like jealousy, is always tormenting. Every imaginary slight, every groundless and trifling accident, will soon be made a fresh occasion of trouble and disquiet. How much it makes for the ease and quiet of our minds to keep them within the bounds of reason and discretion! In conclusion, enforce this advice, of being "slow to anger," and of "ruling our spirits." Nothing better recommends the Christian religion than this, that it is most fitted and accommodated for the sweetening men's tempers, and for taking off the edge and keenness of their spirits. It not only provides rules, but also sufficiency of grace for carrying them out. (*George Rouse, D.D.*) *The essentials of self-control*.—The records of the past are replete with the triumphs of human genius. In all lands monuments are the marks of greatness. To be recorded in history, to be eulogised in panegyric, is the dream of this world's ambition. But what shall we say to him who has gained the mastery of himself? What Phidias shall rear for him the temple of his renown? Only God is the competent eulogist of such a man. Three things essential to self-mastery—self-knowledge, self-denial, and self-consecration. Self-control is not self-destruction. All the great appetites and passions of our natures were given for a beneficent purpose, and when gratified within the limitations of law, the gratification is as pure as a saint's prayer or an angel's song. There is no sin in temptation. The sin comes in yielding to temptation. Temptation is the evidence of virtue. Totally depraved spirits are never tempted. Self-mastery is the harmonious action of sensibilities, of all our mental appreciations, of all our physical functions, in harmony with the purpose for which they were created. There is an old saying in the Church that "vice is the excess of virtue." That which is holy in itself becomes unholy by transcending the law of limitations. 1. Each one of us must sit in judgment upon his own temperament. How shall we gain the necessary self-knowledge? Science will throw light upon your path, but you may see yourself in this precious book photographed in pen-portraiture. The Divine illumination it gives will be more than a Mentor, it will be a Divine companion suggesting thoughts, awakening desires, creating motives, exalting purposes. 2. Indispensable to self-mastery is self-denial. This is of two kinds—the refusal to do those things which are prohibited in the Divine law; the magnanimity of self-abnegation for the sake of, and service of, others. This is the higher self-denial. A man should deny himself of what is lawful to him, that he may be a benefactor of mankind. 3. Most important of all is self-consecration. Conscious weakness is more often an element of real strength and victory than conscious power, for weakness may lean on the strength of God. You will never get this self-mastery otherwise than here in the reading of the Scripture. I reject everything except the Divine Saviour, who has power to invest me with power to master every passion and every appetite, and then to refine all my sensibilities, and give tone and character to my conversation, and spirit to all my life. (*Bp. Newman, U.S.A.*) *Christian moderation*.—Book of Proverbs is the best of all manuals for the formation of a well-balanced mind. We go to this book, not so much for full and definite statements of the distinguishing doctrines of revealed religion, as for those wise and prudent canons whereby we may reform extravagance, prune down luxuriance, and combine the whole variety of traits and qualities into a harmonious and beautiful unity. Here in this text is described and recommended a certain kind of temper which should be possessed and cherished by the people of God. I. DESCRIBE THIS TEMPER.

It is Christian moderation. St. Paul writes, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." He who ruleth his spirit is characterised by sobriety and equanimity. He is never driven to extremes in any direction. A well-poised and symmetrical character floated, as an unattainable ideal, before the minds of the better pagan philosophers. This is the famous "temperance" of Plato and Aristotle. II. SOME OF THE OBSTACLES THAT OPPOSE THE FORMATION OF A CHRISTIAN SOBRIETY AND MODERATION. 1. It is opposed to the appetites and passions of the body. It is one of the effects of the apostasy, that human nature is corrupted on the physical side of it, as well as upon the mental and moral sides. The bodily appetites are very different now from what they would have been had man remained in his original and holy condition. 2. Christian sobriety and moderation meets with an obstacle in man's disordered mental nature. How lawless and ungoverned is the human imagination! It is in some respects easier to control the physical appetites than to rule an inflamed and extravagant fancy. And a man's purely intellectual conclusions and convictions may be so one-sided and extreme as to spoil his temper. Fanaticism in every age furnishes examples of this. III. THE TRUE SOURCE OF CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE AND MODERATION. It must have its root in love. The secret of such an even temper is charity. No man can have this large-minded, comprehensive, and blessed equilibrium who does not love God supremely, and his neighbour as himself. Our subject, therefore, teaches the necessity of the new birth. There may be outward self-control without any inward self-improvement. Without a change of heart, there is nothing but the austere and ungenial attempt of a moralist to perform a repulsive task. Love—holy and heavenly charity—must be generated, and then under its spontaneous and happy impulse, it will be comparatively easy to rectify the remaining corruption, and repress the lingering excesses and extremes of appetite and passion. (*G. T. Shedd, D.D.*) *The greatness of self-rule*:—"For myself I lay no claim to any exceptional fineness of nature. But I say that, beginning life as a rough, ill-educated, impatient man, I have found my schooling in these very African experiences. . . . I have learned by actual stress of imminent danger that self-control is more indispensable than gunpowder, and that persistent self-control is impossible without real, heartfelt sympathy." (*H. M. Stanley.*) *The ruling of the spirit*:—"The things which cost a man the greatest effort and the hardest work may be done with no bodily exertion at all; as a man sits in his easy chair with his eyes shut. The hardest of all work is that which puts the soul upon the stretch; there is no wear like the wear of a heart and brain. The text points out to us a certain work, very difficult to do, very noble when done, which yet is done with so little outward appearance and physical effort that some might perhaps fancy that it is no work at all. Every one who has sought to believe in the Saviour, and to lead a Christian life, must have learned by experience how great a part of the work of an immortal being is mental work, is work that makes no bodily show. I am not thinking of merely intellectual effort; I am thinking of the exertion of the whole spiritual nature. Our entire spiritual life is, in one sense, a "ruling of our spirit." The idea of unseen exertions, of spiritual strivings and efforts, is one with which all believers are perfectly familiar. To rule our spirit rightly is a difficult thing, and a thing from doing which great and valuable results are to follow. This implies that within the heart of man are many unruly tendencies. There is a great deal in every human soul that needs to be kept down. If man's spirit were always ready to do right, it would need no ruling, or the ruling would be a very easy thing. But as it is, it is very difficult. What are the things about our spiritual nature that stand especially in need of ruling? There are impulses to think and feel wrong, and impulses to do wrong. The first of these takes in little impulses, which to resist is no more than matter of worldly prudence, as well as grander temptations, to resist which is of the very essence of religion. It is a noble thing to hold the tendency of anger in check, whether it manifest itself in fretfulness, or in sullenness, or in violent outbursts of passion. To give way to little spurts of petulance, or fretfulness, or general ill-temper is a symptom that something is amiss in your Christian character. The sullen humours or peevish outbursts of a professing Christian are not small matters, if they go to fix in the mind of the young a disagreeable and painful idea of what Christianity and Christian people are. Little duties and little temptations make up, for most of us, the sum of human life. Consider the tendency, in most hearts, to discontent with the allotments of God's providence; to envy and jealousy as regards those of our fellow-creatures who are more favoured and fortunate than we. We should rule our spirit so as to become reconciled to painful things, to

acquiescence in mortification and disappointment when they come; and to feel rightly towards people to whom we are disposed to feel unkindly and bitterly. In all professions and occupations there is competition, and there will be temptation to envy, jealousy, and detraction, as regards a man's competitors. That ruling of the spirit which is needful in Christianity to meet disappointment brings out the best and noblest qualities that can be found in man. Then there is the tendency to procrastination as to our spiritual interests. Many a soul has dated its ruin to yielding to an impulse that ought to have been resolutely put down, to postponing till to-morrow a work which should have been done to-day. (*A. K. H. Boyd.*)

Ruling the spirit the test of greatness:—Ruling the spirit is better than outward conquest, because—I. THE SPIRIT WITHIN A MAN IS ITSELF OF MORE WORTH THAN ANY EXTERNAL CONQUESTS. 1. Its inherent excellence. Life in a single individual endowed with intellectuality, conscience and æsthetic feeling, hope, &c., is of more value than any number or extent of soulless possessions: a single spirit outweighs the material globe. 2. It is the object of God's love. He is interested in things, but loves spirits. 3. It is immortal. Empires gone; cities desolate; all else but spirits passing away. II. IT REQUIRES MORE PERSONAL STRENGTH TO RULE ONE'S OWN SPIRIT THAN TO MAKE OUTWARD CONQUEST. The outward conquest is through the machinery of circumstance; the inner by one's own resources. III. Self-conquest is better than secular, because it is ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH A HIGHER PROCESS OF WARFARE. It drills not with arms, but with virtues. Its manual consists in "whatsoever things are honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report." The fight itself pays independently of the promised results. What the control of one's spirit involves.

1. The independent ordering of one's own words and actions. Few are able to determine within themselves what shall be the outcome of their lives. 2. Back of this, self-control involves not only the ordering of one's own conduct, but also the deliberate moulding of one's desires and purposes in accordance with one's best judgment. Reason must check or encourage the feelings. 3. And back of this, self-control involves the deliberate determination of one's own judgment in the light of evidence. It rigidly excludes prejudice. What helps have we for the control of our own spirits? 1. The Holy Spirit: an impartation of peace, purity, and a sound mind. 2. The sense of the presence of Christ: the influence of the knowledge that the greatest and holiest of beings is watching and encouraging us. 3. Engrossment with the great things of God: all life lifted above the plane of its own littleness; meditating the eternal, the spiritual, the mighty laws of the glorious kingdom; and thus unaffected by temporary influences, as the stars are unaffected by the winds. 4. Charity in the heart: a loving man unjustified by enmities, envies, the pinches of pride; an essential serenity. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Self-victory:—Do not people often say to us, "Conquer yourself"? Can anybody conquer himself? God can conquer him! "Better." Why is a person who conquers himself "better" than a general who takes a city? 1. He is a greater hero; he does a more difficult thing—a nobler deed. Shall I tell you why it is so difficult? Because God meant it to be difficult. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they were friends with the devil. But God said, in great mercy, "You shall not always be friends. I will put enmity between you." And when boys or girls begin to try to conquer themselves, they find the "enmity": they find what a hard thing it is to fight against their sins. 2. And the reason why it is so difficult to conquer any bad habit is because there are all sorts of powers fighting with that fault against you. 3. It is not only a braver but a happier thing to conquer one's self than to "take a city." There is happiness in one's conscience if one succeeds in conquering something that is naughty; and there is no happiness like it in the world. If you take cities it will not make you happy. When Alexander the Great took nearly all the cities in the world, he sat down crying, because he could not find more worlds to take. But if you try to do good, and gradually conquer your own besetting sin, you will feel within such a peace as no words can describe! 4. Now, there is another thing—it is not only braver and happier, but something better still—it pleases God. That must be best. Now, the reason why it pleases God so much for you to conquer your sins is because you will be growing like Jesus Christ. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*)

The ruling of the spirit:—You remember the story of "Sindbad the Sailor": how the Old Man of the Sea, when he got Sindbad to lift him up in pity for his infirmities, sat astride upon his shoulders, clinging closely to the poor man wherever he went, compelling him to do whatever he wanted until his life became a burden to him. So the lower nature when it gets the better of the higher makes it its

slave and compels it to do its bidding, until the degrading bondage becomes so irksome that one would give anything to throw it off. Now, you are all born with a sinful nature. You inherit a tendency to sin. God only can give you power to rule your spirit, and through your ruling spirit to rule your whole body and life. God only can crown the king in you again and make him master of all your unruly passions and rebellious desires. You can reign as kings over yourselves, only in subjection to Him. Now, it is to be feared that in every one's nature there is a devil's corner; that while strict in some points you are apt to be lax in others, and to compound for sins that you love by condemning sins that you do not care for. You want to be considered good, while you sacrifice a part of your nature to evil. But this is a terrible delusion. If a corner of that kind is allowed to remain waste and uncared for in your hearts it will assuredly corrupt the whole of your nature.

1. The very first thing you have to do in ruling your own spirit is to commit your spirit to God. That is what David did; that is what Jesus did. You are apt to think that you commit your spirit to God only when you die and give up the breath of your body. But you can do that now in your youth, in your health and strength. You will have on your side the strength of Omnipotence. God will help you to subdue every rebellious attempt your spirit makes to escape from its blessed yoke. You can defy the devil in the name of the righteous Lord who claims you. I remember when sailing one day in a steamer, the captain's son, a bright little fellow of five or six years of age, was on board and wanted to take the place of the man at the helm. The good-natured steersman, to humour him, put the spoke of the wheel into his little hand, which was hardly able to grasp it. But he was careful at the same time to put his own big hand on the child's tiny fingers, and took a firm hold and moved the wheel in the right direction. And the boy was in high glee, imagining that he himself was steering the huge steamer. Now, so God deals with you. He puts His almighty hand on your feeble hand when you are ruling your own spirit, and makes His strength perfect in your weakness.

2. Now, I want you to rule your spirit, not under the influence of fear, but under the influence of love. He who asks you to do this, who gives you strength to do it, rules you in love.

3. And is it not a happy thing to rule your own spirit under God? You have seen a piece of complicated machinery with all the cog-wheels fitting into each other, and all set going and controlled by one central force. How smoothly the machine worked toward the one good result! In a model city where every one obeyed the governor and did his own work, and the good of each was the good of all, how pleasant would life be! And so when the spirit in each one of you is ruled by the love of God, by the supreme desire to do His will, your condition is a truly happy one. You are so made that all your faculties and powers, when working in their just relations, make up the most complete unity in the universe, the image of the very unity of God. Better far is it to rule your spirit and produce this blessed unity than to conquer the grandest city in the world. The conqueror of a city overcomes it by force and rules it by fear. He enters it against the wish of its inhabitants, and there is disorder and bloodshed, fire and sword; and if he succeeds in producing order it is all on the surface—beneath, in the hearts of the people, there are hatred and the desire for revenge. But if you rule your own spirit, then all your powers fall into their right order, and all that is within you willingly obeys the control of the spirit. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 33. The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.—*All contingencies under the direction of God's providence.*—I. CONSIDER THE RESULT OF A "LOT" IN REFERENCE TO MEN. Why suspend the decision of some dubious case upon it? It implies something future, and something contingent. It is something absolutely out of the reach of man's knowledge, and equally out of reach of his power. A contingent event baffles man's knowledge and evades his power.

II. CONSIDER THE RESULT OF A LOT IN RESPECT OF GOD. All contingencies are comprehended by a certain Divine knowledge, and governed by as certain and steady a providence. God directs the greatest casualties under His providence to certain ends, in reference to societies and to particular persons. In the latter case, touching their lives, their health, their reputation, their friendships, and their employments or preferments. Since the interest of governments and nations, of princes and private persons, notwithstanding all the contrivance and power that human nature can exert about them, remain so wholly contingent, as to us, surely all the reason of mankind cannot suggest any solid ground of satisfaction, but in making that God our friend who is the sole and absolute disposer of all these things,

and in carrying a conscience so clear towards Him as may encourage us with confidence to cast ourselves upon Him, and in all casualties still to promise ourselves the best events from His providence, to whom nothing is casual, who constantly wills the truest happiness of those that trust in Him, and works all things according to the counsel of that blessed will. (*R. South.*) *Grounds and limitations of human responsibility*.—Define the provinces of human and Divine agency. Our duty is commensurate with our power. We are responsible for the moral character of what is done just so far as it depends upon ourselves. Within the circle where man has the power to will and to do of his own pleasure is the field of human agency. Here man is held responsible. All beyond this province of human responsibility is done by the power of God. This thought of Divine providence is the most consoling and inspiring that ever visits the heart, though it cannot give joy to the heart where it is not welcomed. Our knowledge of human and Divine agency is constantly extending. We are continually opening upon new views, which show us that many things which are called acts of God come within the sphere of our own responsibility, and are, in truth, our own actions springing from our own doing or our own neglect; and the consequences of them we must expect to bear. Moreover, the arts and improvements of civil life are continually investing men with new powers, and given him a mastery over nature which in former days he never dreamed of possessing. Then is not the sphere of Divine providence getting lessened? Nay, the more we feel our own responsibility, the more shall we recognise the agency of Heaven in all things. What is it we adore in the providence of God? It is its vast reach of vision, and its ever steadfastly pressing on to that which is right. (*W. B. O. Peabody.*) *Divine providence*.—The general doctrine of providence derives support from sources independent of Divine revelation. It is another term for the government of God, by which all events are made to concur with His wise and holy purposes. Look at providence—1. In the mode of its operations. 2. In the vastness of its range. 3. In the punishment of the wicked. 4. In its aspect on the Church. The doctrine of Divine providence is full of consolation. All must be right when God controls and reigns over all. (*John George.*) *God's providence even in trifles*.—God's providence may be seen not only in the whirlwind and the hurricane, the lightning and the storm, but also in the very least of natural manifestations. Surely, without unduly pressing our text, we may bring forward a familiar illustration of the way in which even trifles, as man calls them, have been made to work out mighty results. Take, for instance, the discovery of the laws of gravitation, and the great results in which that discovery has issued: how it opened the way to the understanding of the courses of the heavenly bodies; how the orbits of the planets, and their distances, and their relative positions at various periods came to be clearly defined; the influence of these discoveries on the laws of navigation, and the consequent facilities for communication between places separated by thousands of miles upon the ocean. We are daily in the enjoyment of the conveniences and luxuries which spring from these discoveries. We may be ignorant of the laws which have been deduced, or even of the practical applications of these laws; of their results in adding to our comforts we cannot be ignorant. Now, is it too much to say that these discoveries are the result of God's providential government? But, if this be granted, we cannot stop here; it follows that the means by which this knowledge was acquired were not beyond the Divine control; nay, rather were subservient to it, and governed by it. And so, at last, we see by manifest logical conclusion that the finger of God may be traced even in that trifle, as it might have been called, which led the wise man's mind to excogitate the mysteries among which we live. And whether we endeavour to trace the working of the finger of God in the intricacies of the human mind, or in the external influences which affect the mind, or in the coincidences by which great events are deduced from small beginnings, yet in each alike we may say, and say with reason, "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." Apply this lesson in another way, to the case of sickness—for here, again, we may attain to very practical results. Now, I apprehend that the generality of men do certainly look upon sickness as a casualty—a mere matter of accident or chance. If you were to question them strictly you might at last extract from them in general terms a confession that God is the author of life or death, of health or sickness; but it has no practical effect. It is not a really powerful religious principle, for they are ever speaking of proximate causes, and not of the great First Cause. Take now a particular case, in part illustrative of my meaning; it shall be the case of the blind man, recorded in St. John ix. I adduce this case to

illustrate the general principle that sickness cometh not by chance, but by God's will and permission, and that its results are known by God, and that it comes to accomplish the purpose for which He hath sent it. Again, the same order and regularity are observable in the kingdom of grace. All the profit and advantage which men receive from the ministry of the Word and Sacraments is of God. An eloquent sermon may be delivered, but the preacher cannot tell whose heart it may reach or whose mind it may affect. The lot is cast, as it were, into the lap; the preacher knoweth not the issue thereof, for the whole disposing of it is of the Lord. Now, I think that these considerations may have a very practical effect upon us; they touch our every-day life; they console us in failure, when failure results from no lack of diligence on our part; they humble us in success. But does this lead us to believe in any doctrines like those of the fatalists? By no means. Every man is a free agent, working out for himself future weal or woe as he will. His mind is fixed in a certain course, and his thoughts tend to that direction. God often checks him if he is going astray, and pleads with him, and throws hindrances in the paths which lead to evil. And though a man's course of life may be evil, yet there are influences which are running counter to that evil course, and checking him, and compelling him to pause and think. And why is this—but because, though the lot be cast into the lap, yet the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord? (*W. S. Simpson, M.A.*) *The Lord's disposing* :—After all, what silly and short-sighted children we are! Only spelling out the alphabet in God's infant school, and yet aspiring to a seat in His cabinet! How differently our life-stories will read when we have a chance to correct them in the clear light of heaven! Then we shall discover under the head of "Accidents" there was written as in invisible ink, "The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing thereof is of the Lord." On the page that we had surrounded with black lines, and inscribed it "Obituaries," we shall see how distinctly a Divine finger has written, "Whom I love I chasten." (*Theodore L. Cuyler.*)

CHAPTER XVII.

VER. 1. Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than an house full of sacrifices with strife.—*The maker and breaker of a family's peace* :—Truth sweetens the relations of life; falsehood eats like rust into their core. When they live in love, men meet each other softly and kindly, as the eyelids meet. Envy casts grains of sand between the two, and under each. Every movement then sends a shooting pain through all the body, and makes the salt tears flow. So good are peace and love for human kind, that with them a family will be happy, though they have nothing else in the world; and without them miserable, although they have the whole world at their command. A dinner of herbs and a stalled ox indicate the two extremes—humble poverty on the one side and pampered luxury on the other. When love leaves the family circle, it is no longer a piece of God's own handiwork, and there is no security for safety in any of its motions. Love is the element in which all its relations are set, for softness and safety; and when it has evaporated, nothing remains but that each member of the house should be occupied in mounting a miserable guard over his own interests, and against the anticipated contact of the rest. In that dislocated house, each dreads all, and all dread each. Some rich families live in love, and doubly enjoy their abundance: some poor families quarrel over their herbs. Riches cannot secure happiness, and poverty cannot destroy it. Whether it be husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant, the disturber of a house must answer to its almighty Protector for abusing His gifts, and thwarting His gracious designs. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. The fining pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold: but the Lord trieth the hearts.—*God's fining pot and furnace* :—The text is a parabolical description of God's almighty power and wisdom, for the discovery and reformation of the closest, and subtlest, and perfectest thing in the world, which is the heart of man. **I. THE PROPOSITION.** First part of the verse. The metals mentioned are silver and gold. The instruments are the fining pot and the furnace. Good men are like gold and silver in sundry regards. **1. From the solidity and substantialness of their prin-**

ciples. 2. From the purity and sincerity of their conversation. 3. From the splendour of their example. Their hearts are like gold and silver, but it is like gold and silver in the ore, which has a great deal of dross mixed with it, and must be separated from it by God's instruments of purification. The "fining pot" represents the Word of God, the "furnace" represents the rod of God, or affliction. The furnace is not for the hurt of the gold, but for its advantage. Labour to be bettered by every hand of God upon us, that so therein we may close with His gracious ends. II. THE REDDITION. "But the Lord trieth the hearts." This adversative particle hath a threefold emphasis in it. 1. An emphasis of proportion. Taking "but" for "so." The Lord is no less able or careful to try the hearts of the sons of men than the goldsmith is his silver and gold. God tries the heart either in a way of discovery or of purification. He tries them so as to discern them, and make known what they are. This kind of trial has two seasons, this present time and the world to come. He tries them to purge them, and remove their corruptions from them. This He does out of love to themselves, that He may make them vessels of honour. In reference to their works, that they may bring forth more fruit. For the sake of others. 2. An emphasis of exception. As restraining the skill of the refiner in this particular. He may be able to refine his metals, but he cannot try the heart. 3. An emphasis of appropriation. "The Lord trieth the hearts," i.e., the Lord alone does it. This is His prerogative. None other can try the heart thus authoritatively, and none can try it so effectually. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Heart tests* :—The chemical analyst has different tests for different poisons. If he suspect the presence of arsenic, he will use one thing to detect that; if he is looking for antimony, he will take another to discover that; if he is trying for strychnine, he will employ quite another to bring that to light. (*W. M. Taylor, D.D.*) *Religious lessons from metallurgy* :—To get the dross out of us, this is the sovereign aim of our training in this world. In education the main purpose is to free the mental faculties of the dross of sloth and prejudice. In active life the great success is in confirming the fibre of energy and character. In higher relations the object of the Almighty is to burn out the dross of the spirit and make us noble and pure. What is dross in human character? Suppose you are inclined to avarice, the excessive love of money. If you think of your own character as strengthened, made better, do you think of that quality of avarice as untouched? Do you think of it as stronger than it is now? Or do you think of it as weaker, as melted down in part, and poured off from your soul like scum? Now consider profanity, levity, intemperance, lust, moral sluggishness, vanity, haughtiness, insolence of words or manners, irreverence, rebellion in feeling against Providence—translate these into natural language, into the language of metals and the crucible, what are they?—valuable elements or foul ones, dross or gold? But take the converse qualities—reverence, purity, zeal for good, aspiration, generous use of money, the spirit of sacrifice, charity, devotion to the will of God—how do you represent these in your imagination? You say at once these are the precious elements of human nature and human life. These are the pure silver and gold of the moral world. Now, God is seeking to bring out these qualities into greater concentration and prominence by His moral government. Left to ourselves, to the wandering, undirected impulses of our constitution, mentally and morally, we should always be in the ore state. The hardships of life, the tough conditions that surround the attainment of truth and the training of character, are God's reducing and refining processes. I do not mean to maintain here that all the hard conditions of life can be explained by this figure, or by any figure or theory of man's device. But a world without hardships to such beings as we are would be a far worse, a far more disastrous world than the present. What would a ton of ore, taken out in one slab, be likely to say if it could be conscious, when carried to the batteries of the mill, and then washed for gold, and roasted to drive off sulphur, and pounded again, and mixed with quicksilver, and heated once more to drive off the mercury, and melted again into a mixed bar, and assayed, and still once more melted and granulated into cold water, and then gnawed by nitric acid, to take up the silver and leave the gold as sediment, and then precipitated from the acid as pure silver powder, and washed, and packed into cakes by hydraulic presses to squeeze the water out of it, and melted again in bars, and run through rollers, and punched, and milled, and stamped—thus becoming fit to serve the daily necessities of civilisation? Suppose it should be told, half-way in the process, that all this was good for it, was part of a great plan, supremely wise, for its permanent benefit! Would it not be likely to say, "Why did you not leave me in my sluggish content in the darkness of the mine?"

I was happy there. I had no dream there of a higher and better lot. I should have never known these terrible buffets and scourgings and bitings and pressures if I had been left there. Oh, for that gloom and calm again!" In its silver-bar state, afterwards in its coin-state, will it say so? It can look back then on the trials and pains, and see their meaning and read their bitter but splendid benevolence. We see enough now to show that the best qualities of human nature are brought out and tested by difficulty and suffering. To the choice characters of the world God can say now, as the Spirit said through Isaiah, "I have refined thee, but not with silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." And if this world is designed not as the final state for the enjoyment of God, but as the state in which we get the preparation of quality within for the true knowledge and enjoyment of Him, we find the whole secret of life—of its terrors and its hidden mercy—when we follow the ore from its cave to its appearance as the clean silver and the flaming gold. Do not fail either to receive the searching lesson as to judgment hidden in this analogy. The ore is tested thoroughly at the final process of its history. The assayer, by balance and fire, determines exactly what its quality is and its worth. And the processes of God's government are taking us to judgment. It is to be known and seen one day just what we are. To the great judgment of truth you and I, and all the millions living, are moving with every heart-beat, and nothing can save us from its severity and its rewards. "The fining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the hearts." 1. If we pass now to consider sectarian divisions and strifes in the Christian Church, we can gain some help in a right estimate of them and for a wise charity, from analogies in the science of metallurgy. The great object of the New Testament and of Christianity is to increase religious qualities practically in the world, to add pure working forces to life, so that men will be nobler and happier in themselves and in their relations to each other. God has made different kinds of ores, and equally rich in different kinds. For some kinds of mineral one process is admirable; for other kinds a very different treatment is essential. And human nature is analogous. Evils are thrown off from men, and good is practically brought out, by a variety of spiritual methods; and that Church or system of training is the best for a soul which fits its temperament and quickens its will. In some men the good is quickly and easily appealed to and developed. A simple faith and administration will reach and awaken it. Others have the sulphurets in the soul. They are obstinate. Common batteries and cool washings do not do the work. They need heat, fire, the treatment of the element of fear; that takes hold of them. Calvinism is the process that reduces their stubborn self-will and makes them agents of good. Give the proper temperaments to each Church: let the Episcopalians take those that can be best reached by their methods, and the Methodists take their natural material, and the Swedenborgians and the Quakers and the Calvinists theirs, and the Unitarians theirs, and great good will be done. The world of character will be richer. The work of the Spirit will be variously and properly performed. "There are differences of administrations, but the same Lord." In science men appeal to the facts. If you put in a ton of ore and take out a pound of gold, you may say that there ought to be two pounds, but you can't say that the process does not produce any gold. And if a system of Christian administration produces honesty, integrity, principle, charity, interest in worship, interest in good ideas and good government and liberty and order, quiet and elevated homes, readiness to serve others and to hold gifts and treasures partly in trust for others—are these qualities to be denied to be good because the process which produces them is different from the ordinary customs? The melter and assayer does not make coin; society does not allow him to put his stamp on money and say, "All gold is spurious which is not poured from my crucibles." It is his office to produce gold. The Government coins and issues it, and allows that great office to no private hands. So the business of Churches is to produce purity, reverence, integrity, charity, readiness to do good in all forms. God rates and stamps the products, and His judgment is the final and the only one as to the honesty or spuriousness of the products of the sanctuaries. There is one other point upon which I wish to make our subject bear in illustration. 2. There is a great discussion now about the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and its religious value. Is it a verbally inspired, completely accurate, and authoritative revelation? The Old Testament is a very wonderful book, and its value in the religious and providential training of the world cannot readily be stated. But it is not a continuous revelation. It does not offer you concentrated spiritual truth in all its pages, the pure silver and gold of the Spirit. The Old Testament is a great lode, or precious

mineral vein, upheaved and winding through the strata of a national history. There are different kinds and qualities of ore in it, some easy, some difficult of reduction to the pure standard of moral truth. The Old Testament, compared with all other ancient national literatures, is a religious gold and silver vein immensely, incalculably, divinely rich. That is its distinction in the world, and will be its distinction for ever. And by the statement and authority of Jesus Himself, we get its concentrated value in the laws of love to God and our neighbour. If you understand little of commentaries and theological discussion and council lore, and have these, you have what Jesus Christ called the essentials. Knowledge of mining is good, but its practical value is in furnishing the silver for human use. This spirit of love is the silver into which the inspiration collected from the ore of the Bible is finally reduced. If you do not possess this spirit, your Biblical learning is only intellectual wisdom, your soundness of faith is only correct thinking; and though you may be baptized every day in the name and forms of the most orthodox creed, you advance not by a step towards the kingdom of heaven. (T. Starr King.)

Ver. 4. A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips; and a liar giveth ear to a naughty tongue.—*The conversational likings of bad men*.—Men's characters may be known by the conversations they most relish. The text enables us to see the kind of conversation that bad men like. I. **THEY LIKE FLATTERY.** "A wicked doer giveth heed to false lips." The flatterer is a man of false lips. The more corrupt men are, the more blindly credulous to everything that makes them appear better than they are. He who compliments them palliates their offences, gives them credit for virtues they possess not, is their favourite companion, and they ever "give heed" to his lips. One of the best things recorded of George III. is, that one of his first acts after his ascension to the throne was to issue an order prohibiting any of the clergy who should be called to preach before him from paying him any compliment in their discourses. His Majesty was led to this from the fulsome adulation which Dr. Thomas Wilson, Prebendary of Westminster, thought proper to deliver in the Chapel Royal, and for which, instead of thanks, he received from his royal auditor a pointed reprimand, his Majesty observing that he came to chapel to hear the praise of God, not his own. II. **THEY LIKE CALUMNY.** The liar is also the "wicked doer." The "naughty tongue," whilst it speaks flatteries and falsehoods of all kinds, speaks calumnies also. And the worse the man is the more welcome to his depraved heart are the reports of bad things concerning others. 1. Calumny gratifies the pride of evil men. It helps them to cherish the thought that they are not worse than others, perhaps better. 2. Calumny gratifies the malignity of evil men. The worse a man is the more malevolence he has in him; the more gratified he is at hearing bad things concerning other men. "If," said Bishop Hall, "I cannot stop other men's mouths from speaking ill, I will either open my mouth to reprove it or else I will stop mine ears from hearing it, and let him see in my face that he hath no room in my heart." (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 10. A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool.—*Moral and corporeal chastisement*.—I. **THE ONE IN ITS SPHERE IS AS LEGITIMATE AS THE OTHER.** Look at the sphere of each. 1. The sphere of the moral. It is for the wise. The "reproof" is for men open to reason and impression—men whose natures are susceptible to moral arguments and appeals. 2. The sphere of the corporeal. It is for "fools." Of what service is an argument to an ox, or a whip to a soul? II. **THE ONE IN ITS SPHERE IS MORE THOROUGH THAN THE OTHER.** "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool." 1. The one is more painful than the other. What is pain arising from a few lashes on the body compared to the pain arising in the soul from a conviction of moral wrong? What pain did reproof give David! (Psa. li.). What agony did the reproving look of Christ give Peter! 2. The one is more corrective than the other. Corporeal chastisement will never do the fool any moral good. You cannot whip the moral devil out of men (chap. xxvii. 22). But moral chastisements correct the wrongs of the soul. The fires of moral conviction separate the gold from the dross. (Homilist.)

Ver. 12. Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.—*The cruelty of fools*.—The rage of wild beasts is short-lived, and their

power is circumscribed within narrow limits. Man has more cause to dread his brother than all the beasts of the forest. Ambition, jealousy, and superstition are sad sources of cruelty. We all abhor the deeds of cruelty which the "fool in his folly" so frequently commits; but alas! we have not all an adequate estimate of the guilt attaching to the man at the moment, and in the act of entering into his folly. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. **The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.**—*Strife and contention*:—Here contention seems to differ from strife, the former being more general, the latter more particular. Strife is by implication wholly forbidden, as being most mischievous; contention is regulated and ordered to be left off, in due time, before it be meddled with. Contending by reason and argument is frequently a duty recommended and practised by the best of men. But so soon as the contending parties refuse to hear reason, and proceed with heat and passion, then arises strife. Then every method made use of to carry a cause tends to widen the breach and inflame the adversaries. If the matter of the strife should only be unseasonable it may nevertheless prove mischievous and fatal by drawing men off from attending to things of the greatest importance to the public welfare, and by souring their temper, make union and concord impracticable. For the manner alone in which strife is usually carried on renders it impossible to be kept in due bounds. Even the end itself, for which the strife was at first begun, is neglected or forgotten. The parties engaged go on from skirmishes to battles, from the provoking of wrath to the drawing of blood. Would you avoid strife, and the mischiefs which naturally follow from it? Then leave off contention in due season: "before it be meddled with," *i.e.*, before the contention be too much diffused or blended with passion; or the parties proceed to open rupture and hostilities; or other persons mix themselves in the quarrel. Compare "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife; but every fool will be meddling." The advice is so excellent and so necessary that one cannot but wish means might be found to put it in practice. When men of birth, education, and fortune are governed in all questions by the dictates of reason and divest themselves of all prejudice and passion, they soon reduce all their differences to an inconsiderable quantity, and settle in such a manner as candour and equity can approve. Let every one, then, in his sphere and station, endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: to quench every spark of discord or strife. To bring this happy work to effect there is but one certain and never-failing method, which is this, to regulate our whole conduct by the Word of God, from whence we are instructed to practise every duty recommended by right, reason, and the best policy. (*John Newcombe, D.D.*) *The beginning of strife*:—The history of the French port of St. Valery, where William I. embarked for the conquest of England in 1066, may well illustrate the truth that the beginning of strife is as the letting out of water. The success of the Norman enterprise did not prevent but occasioned the return of the tide of war after an interval of two centuries. Then during the Hundred Years War it was first burnt by the English, and then by Charles the Bad of Navarre. After that it was destroyed by Louis XI. to keep it out of our hands, and in later years it was sacked by Leaguers, Royalists, and Spaniards, so that the historian of Abbeville says that "history has failed to keep count of its disasters." (*J. F. B. Tinling, B.A.*) *Strife*:—Crabb makes a difference between discord and strife. He says, "Discord evinces itself in various ways—by looks, words, or actions; strife displays itself in words, or acts of violence. Discord is fatal to the happiness of families; strife is the greatest enemy to peace between neighbours; discord arose between the goddesses on the apple being thrown into one assembly. Homer commences his poem with the strife that took place between Agamemnon and Achilles." The passages suggests three ideas concerning strife. I. It is AN EVIL OF TERRIFIC PROGRESS. This strife spreads. One angry word leads to another, one act of resentment, will kindle a fire that may set a whole neighbourhood or a nation into conflagration. A drop of strife soon becomes a river, and the river a torrent. II. It is AN EVIL THAT SHOULD BE CHECKED. "Therefore leave off contention." Every lover of his race and his God should suppress it. It is a desolating thing, it makes sad havoc in families, neighbourhoods, churches, nations. 1. Be inspired with the spirit of peace. 2. Maintain the character of peace. 3. Use the argument of peace. Thus he will check the spirit of strife. III. It is AN EVIL WHICH CAN BE EASILY CHECKED AT THE BEGINNING. You may mend the embankment with tolerable ease at the stage when it emits only a few oozing

drops. The mightiest and most furious beasts of prey you can easily destroy at their birth; the most majestic and resistless river you can stop at its spring head. So it is with strife, in its incipient state you may easily crush it. Crush the upas in the germ, tread out the conflagration in the spark. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 15. **He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord.**—*Our estimate of other men:*—We may regard such an estimate from three points of view: in its effect on those thus estimated, on society in general, and on ourselves. Did we ever question with ourselves, "On what is my estimate of others usually founded"? If we did we should surely be dissatisfied with our present practice. It would be unnatural and absurd to pretend that no influence should be exerted over our estimate of men by the organs of public opinion; equally unreasonable to decry them as perfectly unreliable in the matter. But there may be very much untruthfulness, short of what is utter and absolute; very much which is utter and absolute, and yet escapes detection. What is the duty of Christians with regard to the blame and praise of others? Insist first on the general duty of conscientiousness in forming all our estimates of other men. It should be our aim as Christians, not obsequiously to follow public opinion, but to act for ourselves and for God. There is a timidity, even amounting to cowardice, among us in forming and expressing our opinion of other men. The body of Christian men among us seems to have abjured the duty of conscientiousness; and this abjuration is one of the most fearful symptoms of our times. The duty of estimating others as in the sight of God is not by any means a light one, but a most solemn one. Unholy and unprincipled life, wherever found, ought to be protested against by the servants of God. There is a sad tendency among us to overlook those faults which fall in with the practice of the day, which consist in the neglect of unwelcome duties, or the committal of lightly-esteemed sins. The second person who is said to be an abomination to the Lord is "he that condemneth the just." We are always more prone to condemn than to justify. It is an abuse of our instinct of self-preservation to be ever ready with our hostility to other men. The general propensity to depress others renders it very easy, in any case, to condemn. Point out a few ways by which we may guard ourselves against this tendency to condemn the just. The first caution is this—look ever at the life which is palpable rather than at the motive or the creed, which are usually mere matters of surmise. A second caution is, avoid and refuse to use, and protest against the use of, all party names. Another caution is this—form your opinions of others, not at the prompting of the world, but as under the eye of God. For all our most secret judgments of men and things we are accountable to Him. (H. Alford, B.D.) *Just estimates:*—It was a saying of Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, that a republic walks upon two feet; one being just punishment for the unworthy, the other due reward for the worthy. If it fail in either of these, it necessarily goes lame. How if it fail in both?

Ver. 16. **Wherefore is there a price in the hand of fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?**—*Opportunities of youth:*—The term "fool" is not used in the modern sense of a man without reason; but rather in the sense of an unreasoning man. The term is applied much as we apply the term "wicked man." The figure in the text is one drawn from commerce. It represents a man who has been given a sum which he is to invest. He spends part of it in dissipation, part in unwise and unprofitable commodities, and some part in shadows and cheats and pretences; and when he has expended that sum he is a bankrupt. Wicked or foolish men have committed to them a price or a capital, and what is the use if they have no heart to use it right? What good does it do them if they do not employ it as they should? The idea that men are sent into this world for a purpose, and that they are equipped for the accomplishment of that purpose, is given in both the Testaments. Men comprehensively have committed to them, in bodily organs, and in their mental equipment, a power singularly complex, but wise and efficient, and as compared with the agencies of nature in its adaptations to the work of life, surpassing the human frame itself. Natural laws are the great agencies of nature that are being used or fructified by the volition of man. Each man stands at the centre of a sphere of possibilities where he, through knowledge, may come to control natural law and work in his limited sphere as God works in the infinite sphere. Then there is the good name and fame which descends to many of us from our parents. There is a presumption that stock and blood will

tell, and that a good father will have good children. It is invaluable to a young man beginning life to have the kindly expectation, the generous sympathy and goodwill of those to whom he comes. What a price is put into the hands of the young in our time in the matter of education; if a man has a heart for knowledge, if he has an ambition to acquire it, and if he is quick to discern, the eye, the ear, every sense becomes the minister of education. Alas! that there should be so many who care nothing for it! Closely connected with this is the capital of bodily health. Good health is a wonderful help to morality, to nobility of character, and to calmness and decision of judgment and action. Next is the capacity of industry. I believe fervently in enterprise, but I also believe fervently in the good old-fashioned notions about patient industry. Every person has that in him by which he can win a moderate success in life by simply doing, day by day, the right things, however humble a sphere he may be in. To many have also been given the invaluable qualities of integrity, honour, and fidelity. These are very valuable from a commercial point of view. A man who is honest, and truthful, and full of integrity, when he has finally been proved, has everybody engineering for him. Then look upon life as a very solemn thing. God has given you one life, and has put capital into your hands, and sent you into this world to buy immortality. Do not squander that price. Listen to the voice of wisdom. (*H. Ward Beecher.*) *Means and abilities to get wisdom*.—We may define wisdom to be a right apprehension of those things that are best for us, and a diligent pursuit of them by such means as are agreeable to the laws of piety and virtue. Men have sometimes abilities and opportunities to act wisely for themselves, but neglect them, and have no heart to make their just advantages of them. 1. A man of good natural faculties and endowments of mind may be said to have the price of wisdom in his hand, when he hath no heart to it. 2. This price may be understood of the schools of good education and learning. Those who are brought up in such places often act the part of fools. 3. Riches are in many respects the price of wisdom, in that they enable their owners to buy books, to hire teachers, and to be at leisure to spend their time in the study of useful learning. 4. Men of great power and authority have the price of wisdom in their hands. 5. We have a noble price put into our hands to get wisdom, in the ordinances of religion and means of grace we enjoy. These advantages are the portion of every Christian. But these opportunities are sadly often in the hands of those who have no heart to make use of them. This appears—(1) From the want of zeal in attending public worship; and—(2) From the errors and vices of our common conversation. We often condemn our own mismanagement of the talents which God has given us, and look back with much regret upon those opportunities which have slipped through our hands. But the power is often given without the will, so that we suffer many opportunities to pass away and be lost without improving them to any good purpose. (*W. Reading, M.A.*)

Ver. 17. A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.—*The unrivalled Friend*.—Few men enjoy from others the highest and truest form of friendship. There is, however, a higher friendship among men of principle, among men of virtue. Where godliness builds her house, true friendship finds a rest. Take this text and refer it to the Lord Jesus Christ. I. THE ENDURANCE OF THE LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST. He loved before time began. He loved you when time began with you. Since that day this Friend has loved us at all times. Consider the reality of Christ's love at all times. His love has never been a thing of mere words and pretensions. Consider the nature of the love of Christ, as accounting for its endurance and reality. His love sprang from the purest possible motives. Christ's love was a wise love, not blind as ours often is. He loved us knowing exactly what we were whom He loved. His love is associated continually with an infinite degree of patience and pity. He is so constant in His love, because He sees us as what we are to be. He is described as "born for adversity," the adversity of the fall, and of tribulation. II. REFER THE TEXT TO THE CHRISTIAN. You have found Jesus Christ to be a true brother and a blessed friend; now let the same be true of you. If Christ be such a friend to us, what manner of people ought we to be towards Him? We should be friends that love Christ at all times. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A brother born for adversity*.—I. ADVERSITY IS THE COMMON LOT OF BROTHERHOOD. It comes sooner or later to all of us. It is a necessity of our nature. It is a wise appointment of God. II. THE TIES OF BROTHERHOOD ARE FORMED FOR ADVERSITY. We are united in families for purposes of mutual succour. III. ADVERSITY TENDS TO SANCTIFY THE INTERCOURSE OF THE BROTHERHOOD.

Some of the most valuable of our lessons are taught us in our intercourse with one another. IV. IN ADVERSITY WE ARE LED TO KNOW, IN AN ESPECIAL MANNER, THE PRESENCE OF THE ELDER BROTHER WITH THE BROTHERHOOD. Jesus became a brother in adversity. His sufferings and sorrows enabled Him to sympathise with us in all our struggles and troubles. V. IT IS BY ADVERSITY THAT THE WHOLE BROTHERHOOD ARE GATHERED AT LAST INTO OUR FATHER'S HOUSE ABOVE. (*Anon.*) *Men's friendship*

and Christ's:—Friendship is no fiction; all history bears record to its reality. There are many relationships in this world dignified by the name of friendship which really do not deserve it, as, for example, acquaintanceship, the freedom to interchange visits of courtesy, and association in business. These pass for friendship; but they are only its shadows. The perfect friendship is a very exacting relation. 1. The first value of friendship is that it will give support in weakness, understanding amid evil reports, consolation in sorrow, and help in the bearing of burdens; and that is no friendship which breaks down under such demands. Trouble is a splendid thing for any man if it only sifts his friends; it saves him a deal of trouble in other ways. There is an admirable compensation about our existence. 2. The second service of a friend is that he is one to whom all our thoughts may be uttered, one to whom we may be absolutely sincere. Ordinarily, a man is only honest when he is alone; let another man come in, and hypocrisy begins. Our words are a kind of clothes to hide our real selves. But with a friend we are absolutely open; we do all our thinking aloud, we stand erect before him, and find in his mind a true picture of what we are. Such a friend is a masterpiece of nature. 3. A third service is that it affords us the possession of one soul to whom we may be tender without shame. See the tenderness between David and Jonathan, and between Achilles and Patroclus. When one man becomes dear to another they have both reached the goal of fortune. By a tender friendship the Divine part in us finds exercise. 4. The fourth service which friendship renders is that it helps us to know ourselves and to know God. When you enjoy friendship most it is in contrast to solitude, and you seek solitude again, in order to know what you have gained from your friend. You cannot reckon up a profit and loss account while you are in his company; you have to retire to your own soul's communion in order to ascertain your gain and loss thereby. Thus you have a compensation for intercourse with another soul by introspection of your own. Further, as the power that keeps the atoms together in one body is of God, the tie between your friend's heart and your own is of God, and you cannot let your consciousness of friendship deepen without deepening at the same time your consciousness of God. (*H. H. Snell.*) *Friendship in adversity*:—Love, while it remains essentially the same, appears tenfold more loving when its object has fallen from prosperity into poverty; as a lamp burning in daylight shines much more brightly in the darkness. Many will court you while you have much to give; when you need to receive, the number of your friends will be diminished, but their quality will be improved. Your misfortune, like a blast of wind upon the thrashed corn, will drive the chaff away, but the wheat will remain where it was. How very sweet sometimes is the human friendship that remains when sore adversity has sifted it! (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Friendship*:—The more we understand the world the better we comprehend the Bible. The Spirit that overshadowed its writers knew all the ins and outs of human hearts, all the mysteries of human guilt and grief. I. THE IDEAL OF FRIENDSHIP. Every man cannot be a friend. Friendships cannot be willed, they must be made. They grow; they want resemblances. Earthly friendships have often some element of weakness in them. No man can know more of his brother without knowing the worst as well as the best of him. Friendship with Christ alone satisfies. Here is—1. The test of friendship. "At all times." True only of Christ. 2. The preciousness of friendship. 3. The future of friendship. II. THE IDEAL OF BROTHERHOOD. "A brother is born for adversity." 1. This is a unique fact. 2. It is a designed fact. 3. It is an adapted fact. To be a true brother, Christ must take account of the world as it is, and what word is there more expressive of life than this, "adverse things"—things that turn against us! (*W. M. Statham.*) *Constancy in friendship*:—That is not true friendship which is not constant; it will be so if it be sincere and actuated by a good principle. Those that are fainciful and selfish in their friendship will love no longer than their humour is pleased and their interest served, and therefore their affections turn with the wind, and change with the weather. Swallow-friends, that fly to you in summer, but are gone in winter; such friends there is no loss of. But if the friendship be prudent, generous, and cordial, if I love my friend because he is wise,

and virtuous, and good, so long as he continues so, though he fall into poverty and disgrace, still I shall love him. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 22. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.—*Mental and bodily influence*:—The connection between the mind and the body, though not to be explained, is so striking as to force itself upon the notice of the least observant. There is such a sympathy between the two that the one cannot suffer and the other be unaffected. But the mind will often claim such independence of the body as the body can never assert over the mind. When the torture is of the mind alone, there will be comparatively little bodily capacity to bear up under the pressure. Solomon says here that a "merry heart," a cheerful mind, a spirit contented and well at ease, will administer support and strength for endurance. But Solomon treats also the case of a mind assailed and out of joint, and says that, in this case, the body as well as the mind will be utterly prostrated. **I. THE POWER WHICH THE MIND CAN EXERT IN SUPPORT OF THE BODY SO LONG AS ITSELF IS IN GOOD CONDITION.** Where there is no aid drawn from the resources of religion, there may be firmness the most unflinching in the endurance of pain. The records of savage life prove the existence of a sustaining principle in man. There is a power in man's spirit to sustain his infirmity. The truth that men have no power of renewing their nature must not be interpreted as implying that men have no power of reforming their lives. The doctrine of human degeneracy, preached in an unguarded and overwrought strain, makes men imagine that they can do nothing unless they feel themselves acted on by a supernatural machinery, and that, until they have experienced inward revelation, it is idle to set about outward reformation. We would always hold that a great deal lies in the unconverted man's power. We can never believe, whilst there is the spectacle on earth of mind wielding a thorough sovereignty over matter, a sovereignty so perfect that the body is set before us as literally the vassal of the spirit, we at all exaggerate his abilities when we urge him, as a candidate for the prizes of eternity, to improve the life, and break away from habits and associations of unrighteousness. **II. A MAN'S TOTAL INCAPACITY TO BEAR A WOUNDED SPIRIT.** We are not accustomed to admit up to the full a matter of fact—the physical destructiveness, so to speak, of an overwrought mind. The greatest wear and tear is from mental labour. Mental disquietude tells on the health with corroding and devastating power. It is the gracious appointment of God that a wound in the spirit begins to close so soon as made; so that where there is the wish there is not the power of keeping it long open. If it be true that the endurance of grief cannot be referred to indwelling energy, but rather to that soothing action of time which comes into play on the first moment of affliction, then there is no witness from the experience of mankind against the truth of the text. It cannot be assumed that a spirit is broken until stricken by that Word of God which is "quick and powerful." Conviction of sin is the unbearable thing, and an awakened conscience an irresistible tormentor. A truly broken spirit is that which is bruised by a sense of sin. It is impossible that man should long sustain the anguish of conviction of sin. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *A cheerful spirit*:—**I. THE VALUE OF A CHEERFUL SPIRIT.** 1. It helps bodily health. 2. It is a clarifier and invigorator of the mind. 3. It lubricates the wearing machinery of business and daily care. **II. HOW ATTAIN THIS SPIRIT?** 1. Look at your mercies with both eyes; your troubles with only one eye. 2. Learn Paul's secret: "In whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." 3. Be useful. Light somebody's torch, and your own will burn brighter. 4. Make God your trustee. Believe in His care of your welfare. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Bodily health depending on mental moods*:—So closely connected is the soul with the body, that physical health is ever, to a great extent, dependent on mental states. A dark thought has power to work disease and death into the corporeal frame. This is a fact—1. Recognised by medical science. A wise physician avails himself of this fact, and is ever anxious not only to dispel all sad thought from the mind of the patient, but to awaken the most pleasurable thoughts and emotions. It is a fact—2. Attested by general experience. **I. THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN FOR HIS PHYSICAL HEALTH.** Man is responsible for his mental disposition, whether cheerful or gloomy, and his disposition greatly determines his health. **II. THE DUTY OF THE GUARDIANS OF CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH.** **III. THE SANITARY INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY.** The design of Christianity is to fill the human heart with joy. "These things have I spoken unto you that your joy may be full." Christianity is the best physician to the body. He who promotes Christianity is the wise philanthropist. Some people are always trying to keep the

body well, and neglect entirely the condition of the soul. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The effects of cheerfulness and of despondency*:—I. THE MEANING OF THE TERMS. 1. By “a merry heart” is meant a heart which has been taught by the Spirit of God to seek its happiness in Divine and heavenly objects, which is disposed to look at the bright side of things under the influence of contentment and hope. Such a heart has the best reason for cheerfulness. Faith keeps it from suspicion and distrust, hope from despair, and charity from that envy which is a rottenness of the bones. The love of God shed abroad in the heart makes it form the most favourable idea of every dispensation, and Christ dwelling there brightens all around by His presence. 2. By the “broken spirit” is meant a heart crushed by affliction, and which refuses to be comforted. Such is his spirit who, seeing his affairs ruined by his own folly, or the knavery of others, or by misfortunes which he could neither foresee nor prevent, sinks into utter despondence, and becomes incapable of the least effort to better his circumstances. Such is his spirit who, seeing the desire of his eyes taken away with a stroke, imagines he has nought now to live for. Such also is the spirit of the man wounded by remorse, or shattered by the influence of indulged melancholy, jealousies, suspicions, and fears. II. ILLUSTRATE THIS VIEW HERE GIVEN OF THE RESULT OF CHEERFULNESS AND DEPRESSION. 1. Let us consider their influence on the body. The influence of a suitable medicine on the body is wonderful. Disease is checked or alleviated by it when first received; the continued use of it removes it entirely, and strengthens the constitution to resist its further attacks. Such is the power of holy joy over the health. On the other hand a broken spirit dries up the bones, and the finest constitution sinks under its influence. 2. Consider their influence on prosperity and adversity. All the comforts of prosperity are heightened by a cheerful spirit. So amiable does prosperity appear when thus enjoyed, that every heart wishes its continuance; but the broken spirit is a stranger to all the satisfactions as well as the homage of gratitude. On such a heart all its delights are lavished in vain. The cheerful heart can triumph in adversity. But how different is the case with the broken spirit! Every temporal disaster is the supposed prelude to their ruin, &c. 3. Consider the influence of cheerfulness and of depression on the soul. Cheerfulness quickens all the powers of the soul in their exercise; the imagination forms the most pleasing ideas of scenes and objects; memory calls up the most joyous recollections; hope paints the future blissful as the present; and the understanding, rejoicing in the truth, pursues its inquiries with unwearied ardour. On the other hand, when the spirit is broken, the imagination calls up only scenes of woe; memory brings nought to remembrance but what tends to disquiet and torment us; despair clothes the heavens with blackness; and the understanding doth nought but write bitter things, and form the most dreadful conclusions against itself. 4. Consider the influence of cheerfulness and depression on the duties and the pursuits of life. When the heart is cheerful the duties of a man's calling are a pleasure to him. How ingenious is the cheerful heart in finding the means of enjoyment and in extending these! On the other hand, when the spirit is broken the duties of a man's profession are a burden to him. 5. Consider their influence on the connections of life. The man of a merry heart is the happiness of his family and friends. How different is the case with the broken spirit! The indications of joy in his presence such a man is apt to regard as an insult to his wretchedness. Conclusion: 1. How strongly does the broken spirit claim our pity and our prayers! It is impossible to conceive on this side the grave a condition more dreary. 2. Let us carefully guard against the first symptoms of despondence in ourselves and in others. Let us seek out those remedies which the gospel contains for raising the bowed down. 3. Let me address those who are blessing themselves in a false mirth. I know not whether the despairing mourner or the jovial sinner is the greatest object of pity. The jovial sinner's mirth is like the laughter of the maniac, or like the singing of a patient whose brain a fever hath disordered. The broken spirit may lead to that godly sorrow which worketh repentance to salvation, but the audacious mirth of the sinner is most likely to end in weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. (*H. Belfrage, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. Wisdom is before him that hath understanding; but the eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth.—*The nearness of life's interest and work*:—“Far fowls have fine feathers”—that is our modern rendering of the Hebrew proverb. Both proverbs are directed against a common weakness of human nature, our English proverb hitting it off with a good-natured smile, the Hebrew proverb rebuking it

with the bluntness of a moral censor. To make little of what is at our door, and to magnify what is distant, is a familiar way in which the weakness of human nature shows itself. It is a weakness to which most of us must plead guilty, and it is a weakness which proves itself a formidable enemy of spiritual life. There is no chance of our achieving anything great in the spiritual life while we hug the delusion that greatness is to be found far off in space or in time, and that its only congenial surroundings are far different from those in which we find ourselves. The wise man knows where to look for the interest and grandeur of life; he knows they are to be found near at hand, even at his own door. Two directions in which this lesson is needed. I. WE MAY LOOK FOR THE INTEREST OF LIFE IN THE WRONG PLACE. It is difficult to see the spiritual in what is commonplace, the great in what is near, the sacred in what is ordinary. Men go to far-off lands seeking beauty which can be found almost at their doors. The romance of life has often been sought far afield, while all the time a nobler romance was to be found around the door. The wisest delineators of human life have found its romance near home. One reason of the popularity of George Eliot's novels lies just here, that she has taken up the lives of ordinary people, and shown, with fine sympathy, how rich in interest is the common life of the common people. It is of supreme importance for the living of a Christian life that we should have our interest kept fresh and rightly directed. It is not only the flesh that wars against the spirit, but listlessness; not only positive sins, but the deadening weight of the conviction that we are set down in the midst of dull commonplace. Our enthusiasm needs to be aroused, and the rousing of our enthusiasm must spring from the conviction that there is something within our reach worth being enthusiastic about. That conviction often fails us just because we commit the folly which our proverb reproves. Immanuel Kant was never more than a few miles from his native Königsberg. He found in the human mind a field of study exhaustless in its scope and interest. If the life of our town is dull it is because our own souls are dull. The insipidity and commonplaceness of which we complain belong to our own vision. II. WE MAY LOOK FOR THE WORK OF LIFE IN THE WRONG PLACE. The one error is linked with the other. From false views of life there spring erroneous conceptions of the work we may accomplish. It is not circumstances that make a man spiritually great, but the way in which he handles the circumstances. Spiritual greatness springs not from without, but from within. It matters little what may be the rough material put into our hands. The spiritual product we turn out depends upon the spirit in which we work. Our work is not far off in the ends of the earth; it is close beside us. These are no tame, prosaic days in which we live. They may be days of trouble, and unrest, and upheaval, but the Spirit of God is moving as of old upon the face of the waters. We need not sigh for the opportunity of playing our part in the movements of other days. The movements of to-day are enough for our faith, and energy, and devotion. (D. M. Ross, M.A.) *Contrast between a wise man and a fool*:—I. THAT THE ONE HAS A MEANING, THE OTHER AN UNMEANING FACE. One translator renders the words "In the countenance of a wise man wisdom appeareth, but the fool's eyes roll to and fro." God has so formed man that his face is the index to his soul; it is the dial-plate of the mental clock. A wise man's face looks wisdom—calm, devout, reflective. The fool's face looks folly. As the translucent lake reflects the passing clouds and rolling lights of sky, so does the human countenance mirror the soul. II. THAT THE ONE HAS AN OCCUPIED THE OTHER A VACANT MIND. The meaning of Solomon perhaps may be wisdom as before, that is, present, with the man that hath understanding. The principles of wisdom are in his mind, are ever before his eye. Wisdom is "before" his mind in every circumstance and condition. Its rule, the Word of God, is before him. Its principle, the love of God, is before him. Thus he has an occupied mind. But the mind of the fool is vacant. His "eyes are in the ends of the earth." He has nothing before him, nothing true, or wise, or good. He looks at emptiness. Alas! how vacant the mind of a morally unwise man! It is a vessel without ballast, at the mercy of the winds and waves. His thoughts are unsubstantial, his hopes are illusory, the sphere of his conscious life a mirage. III. THAT THE ONE HAS A SETTLED, THE OTHER AN UNSETTLED HEART. The morally wise man is fixed, wisdom is before him and his heart is on it. He is rooted and grounded in the faith. He is not used by circumstances, but he makes circumstances serve him. But the fool is unsettled, his "eyes are in the ends of the earth." His mind, like the evil spirit, walks to and fro through the earth, seeking rest and finding none. (Homilist.) *Common follies*:—If the eyes are in the ends of the earth, they cannot be here, where, probably, the work and duty lie. The man

will stumble over obstacles which he would see if his eyes were where they should be, and he will lose his way. This is a common kind of folly, and appears under different aspects. I. **THE FOLLY OF DISCONTENT.** A man's eyes may be said to be in the ends of the earth if he thinks his happiness lies in a different sphere from that which Providence has allotted to him. The grumbling spirit is widespread, and is not confined to any class of the community. Sometimes the round man is put into the square hole. God does not invariably wish a man to stay for ever in the place where he has been dropped. The mistake is when we so allow these feelings to work in us that they make us disheartened where we are. Some time the tide of opportunity rises to every man's feet, and happy is he if he is ready to take it when his hour comes. But if it does not come, what then? Why, then we must surely conclude that God needs us where we are. II. **THE FOLLY OF THE SCORNER.** A person's eyes are in the ends of the earth if the objects of his admiration are all people he has never seen, and if he has nothing but contempt for those among whom he lives. If the only causes that can awaken your enthusiasm are causes belonging to past centuries, if all your heroes are men who are dead, and you have no living heroes, your eyes are in the ends of the earth. Some go to romance and poetry for the objects of their admiration. But it is one thing to pity the poor in a book, and quite a different thing to pity them in the flesh. III. **THE FOLLY OF THE BUSYBODY.** A person's eyes are in the ends of the earth when he occupies his eyes with the affairs of other people and neglects his own. The gossip; the loud-mouthed politician; the satirist who lashes the iniquities of the times, and who himself is the slave of the same vices. A wise man said that ours is an age when every man wants to reform the world and no one is willing to reform himself. IV. **THE FOLLY OF THE PROCRASTINATOR.** A man's eyes are in the ends of the earth if he is looking forward to the proper use of future time and not making proper use of present time. We all do it. How easy and pleasant is the duty which is going to be done to-morrow! Some are committing this folly in regard to the most important of all concerns—the concern of the soul and eternity. This is a threefold folly. 1. The future opportunity may never come. 2. If it does come, can you be sure that you will then be anxious about eternity? 3. You can only have a mean and selfish conception of religion if you defer it to some future time. You are going to spend your life on yourself, going to give it to the devil, and at last going to creep to Christ and get Him to take you into heaven and save you from the consequences of your sin. Can you hold your face up to a conception of religion like that? Christ wants your life—wants to make it year by year more and more useful and noble. (*James Stalker, D.D.*)

Ver. 26. Also to punish the just is not good, nor to strike princes for equity.—*Striking princes:*—The spirit of lawlessness, which sought a remedy for real or imaginary ills by striking at princes, was not a strange thing in the times of Solomon. The simple negative in Scripture is often stronger and more significant than the first blush of the expression suggests. It is "not good" to strike princes for equity means that it is absolutely bad. It is "not good" morally, for it is a heinous crime; it is "not good" socially, for it fosters a spirit of restlessness and insecurity; it is "not good" politically, for it fails to establish the peace and prosperity of a nation; it is "not good" spiritually, for in the eyes of the Eternal Judge it is an odious sin. Morally, socially, politically, and spiritually it is a gigantic error, a colossal folly, an abominable iniquity, to strike at princes. The expression is capable of three interpretations. 1. It may mean a dogged defiance of their authority—a fixed determination not to obey their laws. 2. It may mean an effort to supplant a prince, a secret or overt attempt to alienate the affections and confidence of the subjects, and transfer the same to another person; a concerted method for placing in the post of honour a rival candidate for popular favour. 3. It may mean assassination, a cruel and cowardly attempt on the life of the sovereign, an execrable conspiracy to hurry into the unseen world the occupant of the national throne. This is a most diabolical and detestable way of attempting to settle real or imaginary grievances; a sin which is sternly condemned by God, and denounced by all right-thinking men. (*J. Hiles Hutchens, D.D.*) *A discourse against rebellion:*—Treason and rebellion are such horrid and loathsome crimes that if they should appear in their native visage and genuine deformity they could never form a party nor allure men to divorce their allegiance. They always, therefore, insinuate into the affections of the unwary or easily deceived multitude under the specious pretences of piety and purity. Some render the second clause of this

verse "princes striking for equity" instead of "striking princes for equity." But this cannot be the true sense in this place. It is against the natural order of the words. The proverb has a double aspect; the one respects princes, forbidding them to punish their righteous subjects; the other respects the people, forbidding them to rebel against their princes for equity's sake. Dealing with this second part, consider—I. THE DOOM AND CENSURE. "It is not good." It speaks only dislike, but means detestation. It implies that it is a crime most impious in itself, and most odious and abominable to God. II. THE ACTION CONDEMNED. "To strike princes." 1. We must not strike princes with the tongue, in their fame and reputation. 2. We must not strike princes in their authority, nor the exercise of it over us. This may be done by refusing to be subject to their laws, or by deposing them from their dominion. 3. It is sacrilege to strike them in their persons, and to offer violence to their liberty or life. III. THE CAUSE, MOTIVE, OR PROVOCATION TO THIS ABOMINABLE ACTION. That is equity. Either the prince's equity or the subject's equity. To strike for either is here censured as a heinous crime. 1. It may be understood of resisting and rebelling against them for their own equity and the execution of that justice which is committed to them. 2. It may be understood of striking them for their subject's equity. That is, it is a great injustice to strike princes upon any pretences of equity and justice in so doing. Never yet was there any insurrection against the lawful magistrate but what was prefaced with glorious pretences, the honour of God, the liberty of the subject, a due freedom for tender consciences, &c. These are all excellent things, and we can never too much prosecute them while we do it in a lawful and allowed manner. But a good purpose can never justify a wicked action, and God abhors that our sins should be made the means of His glory. (*E. Hopkins, D.D.*)

Vers. 27, 28. **He that hath knowledge spareth his words.**—*Signs of a wise man*:—Two ways a man may show himself to be a wise man. 1. By the good temper, the sweetness and the sedateness of his mind. "A man of understanding is of an excellent spirit," i.e., a precious spirit. He is one that looks well to his spirit, that it be as it should be, and so keeps it in an even frame, easy to himself, and pleasant to others. A gracious spirit is a precious spirit, and renders a man amiable and more excellent than his neighbour. He is of a cool spirit (so some read it), not heated with passion nor put into any tumult or disorder by the impetus of any corrupt affection, but even and stayed. A cool head with a warm heart is an admirable composition. 2. By the good government of his tongue. A wise man will be of few words, as being afraid of speaking amiss; he that has knowledge, and aims to do good with it, is careful, when he does speak, to speak to the purpose, and says little, in order that he may take time to deliberate. He spares his words, because they are better spared than ill-spent. This is generally taken for such a sure indication of wisdom that a fool may gain the reputation of being a wise man if he have but wit enough to hold his tongue, to hear, and see, and say little. If a fool hold his peace, men of candour will think him wise, because nothing appears to the contrary, and because it will be thought that he is making observations on what others say and gaining experience, and is consulting with himself what he shall say that he may speak pertinently. See how easy it is to gain men's good opinion and to impose upon them. But when a fool holds his peace God knows his heart, and the folly that is bound up there; thoughts are words to Him, and therefore He cannot be deceived in His judgment of men. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The empire of silence*:—Looking round at the noisy inanity of the world, words with little meaning, actions with little worth, one loves to reflect on the great empire of silence. The noble silent men gathered here and there, each in his department, silently thinking, silently working, whom no morning newspaper makes mention of, they are the salt of the earth. A country that has none or few of these is in a bad way. Like a forest which has no roots, which has all turned into leaves and boughs, which must soon wither and be no forest. Woe to us if we had nothing but what we can show or speak. Silence, the great empire of silence, higher than the stars; deeper than the kingdoms of death! It alone is great; all else is small. (*Thomas Carlyle.*) *Silence and thought*:—Bees will not work except in darkness; thought will not work except in silence; neither will virtue work except in silence. Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XVIII.

VER. 1. Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom.—*The case of diversions stated* :—Dull and insipid is every performance where inclination bears no part. Any one man's sense, however excellent, unless it mixes in society with that of others, always degenerates into singularity and caprice. I. **HOW FAR ARE SOCIAL DIVERSIONS ALLOWABLE?** 1. When there is no reason against any social pleasure there is always a reason for it, viz., that it is a pleasure. To suppose that the Deity would abridge us of any pleasure merely as such when it does not interfere with higher and nobler delights is a notion highly derogatory to His goodness. 2. Diversions are necessary to relieve the cares, sweeten the toils, and smooth the ruggedness of life. He who applies himself to his studies, or any other employment, with proper intervals of refreshment to recruit his spirits, will upon the whole do more good than he who gives unrelieved application. And diversions are necessary under afflictions. The first step towards a recovery of happiness is to steal ourselves gradually from a sense of our misery. 3. Diversions are necessary to endear us to one another. To comply with men's tastes as far as we innocently can in the little incidents of life, to bear a part in their favourite diversions—this knits men's hearts to one another and lays the foundations of friendship. 4. Diversions are requisite to enlarge the usefulness and influence of a good character. It would be worth while for the good to endear, by little compliances, their persons to the affections of mankind, that they might recommend their actions to their imitation. If it be asked, When do we exceed the bounds of reason in our diversions? it may be said if, after having made a party in some entertainments, the soul can recall her wandering thoughts and fix them, with the same life and energy as is natural to us in other cases, upon any subject worthy of a rational creature, it is plain that we have not gone too far. And things suitable enough in youth come with an ill grace in advanced years. The greatest hazard is that we should contract a habit of doing nothing to the purpose and should fool away life in an impertinent course of diversions. II. **THE NECESSITY OF AN EARLY AND CLOSE APPLICATION TO WISDOM.** It is necessary to habituate our minds, in our younger years, to some employment which may engage our thoughts and fill the capacity of the soul at a riper age. We outgrow the relish of childish amusements, and if we are not provided with a taste for manly satisfactions to succeed in their room we must become miserable at an age more difficult to be pleased. Nothing can be long entertaining, but what is in some measure beneficial, because nothing else will bear a calm and sedate review. There is not a greater inlet to misery and vices of all kinds than the not knowing how to pass our vacant hours. When a man has been laying out that time in the pursuit of some great and important truth which others waste in a circle of gay follies he is conscious of having acted up to the dignity of his nature, and from that consciousness there results that serene complacency which is much preferable to the pleasures of animal life. Happy that man who, unembarrassed by vulgar cares, master of himself, his time and fortune, spends his time in making himself wiser, and his fortune in making others happier. III. **SOME REFLECTIONS WHICH HAVE A CONNECTION WITH THIS SUBJECT.** 1. Let us set a just value upon and make a due use of those advantages which we enjoy. Advantages of a regular method of study (as at a university). Direction in the choice of authors upon the most material subjects. A generous emulation quickens our endeavours, and the friend improves the scholar. 2. It is a sure indication of good sense to be diffident of it. We then, and not till then, are growing wise when we begin to discern how weak and unwise we are. (*J. Seed, M.A.*) *The stimulus of desire* :—A person under the strong influence of desire is like a hound in pursuit of a deer, which he keenly and steadfastly follows when he has once caught the scent of it, and continues to track it through a herd of others, and for many a weary mile until he has hunted it down, although those which he has passed by may seem easily within his reach. (*G. Harris.*) *Extracting knowledge* :—There is no kind of knowledge which, in the hands of the diligent and skilful, will not turn to account. Honey exudes from all flowers, the bitter not excepted; and the bee knows how to extract it. (*Bp. Horne.*) *Desire an excitement to diligence* :—If we would get knowledge or grace we must desire it as that which we need and which will be of great advantage to us. We must separate ourselves from all those things which would divert or retard us in the pursuit, retire out of the noise of this world's vanities, be willing to take pains, and try all the methods

of improving ourselves, be acquainted with a variety of opinions, that we may prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The evil of isolation* :—There are people who shun all togetherness in their lives ; they are voluntarily, deliberately separated from their kind. We are to think of one who chooses a life of solitariness in order to follow out his own desire rather than from any necessity of circumstance or disposition ; we are to think of a misanthrope. There are men who separate themselves for the common welfare, such as the student and the inventor. But the misanthrope is one who has no faith in his fellows, and shrinks into himself to escape them. Every man is not only a "self," a personality ; he is a very complex being, made up of many relations with other men. He is a son, a brother, a friend, a father, a citizen. Stripped of these he is not a man, but a mere self, and that is his hideous condemnation. An old Greek saying declared that one who lives alone is either a god or a wild beast. The social instinct is one of two or three striking characteristics which mark us out as human. It becomes therefore a necessity to every wise human being to recognise, to maintain, and to cultivate all those wholesome relationships which make us truly human. Neighbourliness is the larger part of life. Our life is rich and true and helpful just in proportion as we are entwined with those who live around us in bonds of mutual respect and consideration, of reciprocal helpfulness and service, of intimate and intelligent friendship. The relation of Christ, as the Son of God, to the human race as a whole immediately opened up the possibility of a world-wide society in which all nations, all classes, all castes, all degrees, all individualities should be not so much merged as distinctly articulated and recognised in a complete and complex whole. The person of Christ is the link which binds all men together ; the presence of Christ is the guarantee of the union ; the work of Christ, which consists in the removal of sin, is the main condition of a heart union for all mankind. The Christian life must be the life of a community. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *Seeking wisdom* :—Two opposite views have been taken of this verse. One makes Solomon refer to a pursuit of knowledge and wisdom that is right and commendable ; the other regards him as speaking of what is wrong and censurable. Schultens describes the intended character thus : "A self-conceited, hair-brained fool seeks to satisfy his fancy, and intermingleth himself with all things." Parkhurst thus : "The recluse seeks his own pleasure or inclination ; he laughs at or derides everything solid or wise." Another thus : "A retired man pursueth the studies he delights in, and hath pleasure in each branch of science." I am disposed to think that our own translation gives the sense. "Through desire"—that is, the desire of knowledge—"a man, having separated himself"—that is, having retired and secluded himself from interruption by the intrusion of companions and the engagements of social life—"seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom." There is a contrast between the character in the first verse and the character in the second verse. The contrast is between the man that loves and pursues knowledge and the man who undervalues and despises it. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. *The words of a man's mouth are as deep waters.*—*The importance of language* :—Language is one of the principal tests and standards of civilisation. The study of language is one of the most naturally interesting and naturally elevating studies with which the human mind can occupy itself. I. IT IS OF GREAT INTELLECTUAL IMPORTANCE. Only through the instrumentality of language can the thoughts of the mind be revealed and displayed. Nothing betrays more obviously the rustiness and disorganisation of the intellect than inaccuracy and dulness of language. II. THE MORAL IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE IS STILL GREATER. As a rule the relations between intellect and conscience are harmonious. When the intellect is illuminated it brightens the conscience ; when the conscience is quickened it animates the intellect. Language is often a standard of morals. Exactitude of utterance is seldom compatible with great frequency of utterance. Modern writing and modern speech are impotent because they are slipshod. Language is also a great moral force in the world by reason of its variety. A world of one language would not be a very interesting world. III. THE GREAT RELIGIOUS IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE. The utmost solemnity is attached in the Bible to the use of language. What man can think that words are light and little things when he remembers that it is through the instrumentality of words inspired that God has made known His greatest revelations to mankind ? (*Canon Diggle.*) *The words of inspired wisdom* :—There are some who regard the two clauses of this verse as antithetic. The former indicating hidden depths of evil in the wicked man. "The words of

his mouth are as deep waters." That is, he is so full of guile and deceit that you cannot reach his meaning. The latter indicating the transparent communications of the wise and the good. "The wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook." The communications of the one are guileful—the words conceal rather than reveal. The words of the other are honest and lucid. There are others who regard the two clauses as a parallelism. The character of the former clause is to be taken from the latter. The words of a man's mouth—that is, according to the second clause, of a wise man's mouth—are as deep waters, and the wellspring of wisdom as a flowing brook. We shall use the words thus as a parallelism to illustrate the words of inspired wisdom which are "wise" in the highest sense. **I. THEY ARE FULL.** They are as "deep waters." The world abounds with shallow words, mere empty sounds. The words in the general conversation of society and in the popular literature of the day are empty, shells without a kernel, mere husks without grain. But the words of inspired men are full, brimful, full of light and full of power. 1. The greatest thinkers have failed to exhaust their meaning. 2. Every modern thinker discovers new significance. Every paragraph has a continent of thought.

"There lie vast treasures unexplored,
And wonders yet untold."

II. THEY ARE FLOWING. "A flowing brook." The words of eternal truth are always in motion. They pulsate in thousands of souls every hour, and onward is their tendency. 1. They flow from the eternal wellspring of truth. 2. They flow through human channels. Divine wisdom speaks through man as well as through other organs. "Holy men spake as they were moved," &c. The highest teacher was a man, Christ, the Logos. The words of His mouth were indeed as deep waters. Since Heaven has thus made man the organ of wisdom, it behoves man—(1) Devoutly to realise the honour God has conferred upon his nature. (2) Earnestly to aspire to the high honour of being a messenger of the Eternal. Man should not only be the student, but the revealer of God. **III. THEY ARE FERTILISING.** They are here compared to "waters" and to "a flowing brook." What water is to all physical life the words of heavenly wisdom are to souls. They quicken and satisfy. 1. It is a perennial brook. It has streamed down these centuries, imparting life and beauty in its course. 2. It is an accumulating "brook." As brooks in nature swell into rivers by the confluence of contributory streams, so the brook of Divine truth widens and deepens by every contribution of holy thought. And never was it so broad and deep as now. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 6-8. A fool's lips enter into contention.—*The speech of a splenetic fool*:—How frequently Solomon speaks of the fool! and the fool in his idea was not an intellectually demented man, but a morally bad man. **I. IT IS QUERULOUS.** "A fool's lips enter into contention." His ill-nature shows itself in his readiness to pick quarrels, to create frays. **II. IT IS PROVOCATIONAL.** "His mouth calleth for strokes." They irritate the men they speak to, and often prompt to acts of violence. **III. IT IS SELF-DESTRUCTIVE.** "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul." Such speech is indeed destructive. 1. It destroys the man's own reputation. A querulous man has no social respect or command; he is shunned. 2. It destroys the man's own social enjoyment. He has no loving fellowships, no lasting friendships. 3. It destroys the man's own peace of mind. **IV. IT IS SOCIALLY INJURIOUS.** "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." The talebearer as a rule is a man with a splenetic temperament; he delights in mischief. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 9. He also that is slothful in his work.—*Indolence*:—Indolence is a stream which flows slowly on, but yet undermines the foundation of every virtue. It were as little hazard to be tossed in a storm as to lie thus perpetually becalmed; nor is it to any purpose to have within one the seeds of a thousand good qualities, if we want the vigour and resolution necessary for the exerting them. That the necessity of labour ought to be regarded as a punishment is a mean and sordid notion, invented by the effeminate, the lazy, and the vicious. On the contrary, if God had prohibited labour, such prohibition might justly have been deemed a token of His displeasure, since inaction is a kind of lethargy, equally pernicious to the mind and body. An effeminate Sybarite, we are told, thanked the gods very heartily that he had never seen the sun rise in his life. Can there be a more striking

emblem of a narrow and unenlightened mind?—of a wicked and unprofitable servant?

Ver. 10. **The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it and is safe.**—*The security of those who trust in God*.—I. EXPLAIN WHAT IS TO BE UNDERSTOOD BY “THE NAME OF THE LORD.” No particular virtue or charm attaches to the sound or pronunciation of the name. In a mistaken veneration for the name the Jews refused to pronounce it at all. But a rash profanation of the name of God is unspeakably more criminal. By the name of the Lord we are to understand the Lord God Himself—His nature, as it is discovered to us in all His glorious perfection, particularly in His power and goodness to save and deliver them that put their trust in Him. Three principal ways by which God hath discovered Himself to mankind. 1. The visible creation. 2. The written Word. 3. The daily administration of His providence. II. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN THE RIGHTEOUS RUNNING INTO THE NAME OF THE LORD AS A STRONG TOWER? The epithet “strong tower” conveys to the mind the idea of protection and defence. God’s almighty providence is the surest and strongest defence against all enemies of whatever kind, let their art, their activity, their malignity be what they will. 1. Running into the name implies the lively exercise of faith both in the power and the willingness of God to protect. It is only by faith that we can go to an invisible God. Faith, in applying the power and promise of God, receives very much strength from the examples of His mercy, either towards ourselves or others. The name is recorded in every page of the history of providence. 2. The righteous “runneth into the name” by the exercise of fervent prayer. Praying is the immediate and direct means of imploring the Divine assistance and protection. Faith is the habitual principle, and prayer is the actual application of it. Though God knows all our wants perfectly, He requires that we implore His assistance by prayer. And prayer is the natural remedy to which all are ready to fly in extremity. 3. The righteous “runneth into the name” by diligence in his duty; which implies three things: (1) Diligence in all duties in general. (2) A watchful attention to his conduct in every time of trial or danger. Whether his danger arises from bodily distress, from worldly losses, from slander and reproach, the first and great care of the Christian should be to keep his conscience undefiled. (3) The diligent use of every lawful means for his protection and deliverance. (4) A renunciation of dependence on all created help. We run into the strong tower from everything else. III. THE PERFECT SECURITY OF THE RIGHTEOUS. 1. Wherein does this safety consist? “Is safe” might be rendered “is exalted,” “placed on high.” God preserves them from dangers which they could not escape. They have the promise of strength and support in the time of trial. They are sure of deliverance in the end, and complete victory over all sufferings of every kind. 2. The certainty of it is based on the Divine perfections, on the faithful promises, and on the experience of the saints. Learn—(1) The sinfulness of distrust. (2) The remedy for distrust. (*J. Witherspoon, D.D.*) *Two defences—real and imaginary*.—The two verses put side by side two pictures, two fortifications: “The name of the Lord is a strong tower”; that is so, whether a man thinks it or not; that is an objective truth and always true. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city,” because “in his own conceit” he has made it so. So we have on the one side fact and on the other side fancy. The two pictures are worth looking at. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower.” Now, of course, I need not remind you that “the name of the Lord,” or “the name of Jesus Christ,” means a great deal more than the syllables by which He is designated, which is all that we understand generally by a name. It means, to put it into far less striking words, the whole character of God, in so far as it is revealed to men. So we have to recognise in that great expression the clearest utterance of the two thoughts which have often been regarded as antagonistic, viz., the imperfection, and yet the reality, of our knowledge of God. His name is not the same as Himself, but it is that by which He is known. Our knowledge of Him, after all revelation, is incomplete, but it is His name—that is to say, it corresponds to the realities of His nature, and may be absolutely and for ever trusted. “The name of the Lord is a strong tower,” which, translated into plain prose, is just this—in that revealed character there is all that shelterless, defenceless men can need for absolute security and perfect peace. We may illustrate that by considering either Him who defends or him that is defended. On the one hand, perfect wisdom, perfect love, perfect power, that endure for ever; and on the other hand, men

weighed upon by sore distresses, crippled and wounded by many transgressions. These two, the defence and the defenceless, fit into each other like the seal to its impress, the convexity to the cavity. Whatever man needs, God is, and whatever dangers, dreads, pains, losses, sorrows, sins, attack humanity, in Him is the refuge for them all. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower." Do you believe that; and is it an operative belief in your lives? "The righteous runneth into it"; and what is that running into it? Neither more nor less than the act of faith. One of the words of the Old Testament which is frequently translated—and rightly so—"trust," has for its literal meaning to flee to a refuge. So, says our teacher, the way to get into the fortress, and to have the solemn battlements of that Divine name round our unarmed and else shelterless weakness, is simply to trust in Him. But the word suggests the urgency and the effort that will always go with faith. "The righteous runneth into it"—not dawdles in it—"and is safe." And that takes effort and means haste. Do not put off your flight. And stop in it when you are there, by that constant communion with the name of the Lord, which will bring you tranquillity. "In Me ye shall have peace." Stay behind the strong bulwarks. But there is a formidable word in this old proverb. "The righteous runneth into it." Does not that upset all our hopes? I need not say anything about the safety, except to make one remark. The word rendered "is safe" literally means "is high." The intention, of course, is to express safety, but it expresses it in a picturesque fashion which has its bearing upon the word in the next verse, viz., it sets before us the thought that the man who has taken refuge in the strong tower goes up to the top of it by the winding staircase, and high up there the puny bows of the foe below cannot shoot an arrow that will reach him. That is a truth for faith. We have to bear the common lot of humanity, but the evil that is in the evil, the bitterness that is in the sorrow, the poison that is in the sting, all these may be taken away for us. And now I need only say a word or two about the companion picture, the illusory imagination. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and a high wall in his own conceit." It is very hard to have, and to be concerned about, and to use, the external good without putting our trust in it. The Bible has no foolish condemnation of wealth. And we all know, whether in regard to money, or to earthly loves, or to outward possessions and blessings of all sorts, how difficult it is to keep within the limit, not to rely upon these, and to think that if we have them we are blessed. What can we do, any of us, when real calamities come? Will wealth or anything else keep away the tears? What will prevent the sorrows, deal with the sins, or enable us to be of good cheer in the face of death and disease, and to say, "You cannot touch me"? Ah! there is but one thing that will do that for us. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower." The other man has "a high wall in his own conceit." Did you ever see the canvas fortifications at some entertainments that they put up to imitate strong castles?—canvas stretched upon bits of stick. That is the kind of strong wall that the man puts up who trusts in the uncertainty of any earthly thing, or in anything but the living God. Let us keep ourselves within the Divine limits in regard to all external things. It is hard to do it, but it can be done. And there is only one way to do it, and that is by the same act by which we take refuge in the true fortress—viz., by faith and communion. When we realise that God is our defence, then we can see through the insufficiency of the others. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *The name of the Lord a strong tower* :—It is essential that man's hopes should rest on a firm basis. I. THE NAME OF THE LORD IS A STRONG TOWER. Names have a twofold use—to distinguish and describe. Our names generally serve only to distinguish the individual. Sometimes, however, they describe as well as distinguish, and when this is the case, their significance is greatly increased. The name of God is descriptive; it describes the attributes of His character as revealed to us. What God is in Himself is implied in the name Jehovah, the existent. What the Almighty God is to His sinful and rebellious creatures is a matter of anxious inquiry. He is condescending, full of compassion, ready to forgive, slow to anger, yet by no means clearing the guilty. Such is the name of the Lord, which the text reminds us is a "strong tower." A tower is a place built for shelter and security. Its strength consists in the durability of the materials of which it is composed. God's name is called a strong tower, on account of the strength of the foundation on which they build who are sheltered within it. II. THE CONDUCT OF THE RIGHTEOUS. He "runneth into it." The real Christian is the one who is earnest in the pursuit of everlasting life. He is impelled by a sense of danger. He is animated by the hope of safety. III. THE

SAFETY OF THE RIGHTEOUS WITHIN THE TOWER. He is safe from—1. The assaults of the devil. 2. From the world. 3. From his own natural depravity. 4. From the accusations of the law. 5. From the accusations of conscience. 6. From the fear of death. (*J. R. Shurlock, M.A.*) *On trust in God* :—As a strong tower was considered, under the ancient system of warfare, to be a place of entire security from harm, this text is nothing else than a figurative manner of expressing the extreme importance of putting our whole trust in God. The reasonableness of this duty will appear if we consider the Divine perfections. 1. God's unlimited power. It is proclaimed by the heavens, the work of His fingers, and by the earth, which He has suspended upon nothing. Everything declares that He is at least fully competent to our preservation and deliverance. 2. His particular providence, as displayed in the government of the universe. Even things which we are wont to regard as casual and trivial are subjected to His perpetual control. 3. His beneficence. He is ever ready to relieve and to bless. He is not only competent, He is willing to promote our good. 4. His tried and approved veracity. "God is faithful, who hath promised." In our intercourse with each other, experience is the basis of confidence, of mercantile credit, and of moral character. The same principle should lead us to place confidence in God. Two remarks to guard the subject from misconception. (1) God may sometimes appear unkind, and yet be not the less deserving of our full reliance. (2) A compliance with the Divine will is an indispensable requisite to a well-grounded confidence in the Divine favour. A right trust in God includes personal exertions towards attaining the objects of our desire. (*J. Grant, M.A.*) *Our strong tower* :—There are many war similes in the Bible. 1. Men mistake by resting satisfied with unstable and insecure bases. The sense of dependence is in every man so strong that no man can be happy quite alone, and leaning on nothing. Men try to satisfy themselves with one or other of three things. (1) Health. They assure themselves that if they were to lose all they possessed, their health and energy would enable them to make their way in the world again. (2) Friends. They say, "I have friends who are well off, and they will be sure to help me." (3) Money. "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as a high wall in his own conceit." Neither of these "towers" can be safe trusting-places. Health is uncertain. Friends fail. Money takes wing. If they provide some little shelter from the common sorrows of life, they can provide none for those spiritual sorrows which are the real sorrows. 2. Men cannot be truly strong for life until they have God behind them. To know a man is to apprehend all that makes up his individuality, or to "know his name." So the "name of God" includes everything that spheres Him as God: a just apprehension of God and His relations—a true knowledge of God. To know God in covenant is a strong tower. The "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," is God known through relationships and tried by experience. That God can be our "tower." In Scripture, to know the name of any one implies familiarity and confidence; and to know God by name implies such confidence as makes Him to us a strong "tower." To do anything in the name of another is to carry with you their authority, as with the ambassador or the old prophet. The name of God is a storehouse of wealth and strength, from which all recurring needs can be supplied. Then comes the moral force needed to deal with—1. The attacks of life. 2. The defences of life. 3. The retreats of life. Who can use this defence of God? Only the man whose purpose is to live the righteous life, and whose constant effort is to realise his purpose. (*Weekly Pulpit.*) *The name of the Lord* :—I. CHRIST IS A STRONGHOLD, FOR AS SUCH HE HAS BEEN APPOINTED AND ORDAINED BY GOD. Wisdom. II. CHRIST IS A STRONGHOLD, BECAUSE OF THE ABSOLUTE PERFECTION OF HIS OBEDIENCE, AND THE ENTIRE ADEQUACY OF HIS ATONEMENT. Holiness and justice. III. CHRIST IS A STRONGHOLD, BECAUSE GOD HAS ACTUALLY ACCEPTED OF HIS VICARIOUS WORK. Faithfulness. IV. CHRIST IS A STRONGHOLD, BECAUSE AS A KING HE HATH SAT DOWN ON THE RIGHT HAND OF THE MAJESTY ON HIGH. Power. V. THE TESTIMONY OF MEN—THOSE "WHO HAVE FLED FOR REFUGE." (*James Stewart.*) *Our Stronghold* :—Strong towers were a greater security in a bygone age than they are now. Castles were looked upon as being very difficult places for attack; and ancient troops would rather fight a hundred battles than endure a single siege. He who owned a strong tower felt, however potent might be his adversary, his walls and bulwarks would be his sure salvation. I. THE CHARACTER OF GOD FURNISHES THE RIGHTEOUS WITH AN ABUNDANT SECURITY. The character of God is the refuge of the Christian in opposition to other refuges which godless men have chosen; and as a matter of fact and reality. The purpose

of God in our salvation is the glorifying of His own character, and this it is that makes our salvation positively sure; if every one that trusts in Christ be not saved, then is God dishonoured. His character is the great granite formation upon which must rest all the pillars of the covenant of grace, and the sure mercies thereof. His wisdom, truth, mercy, justice, power, eternity, and immutability, are the seven pillars of the house of sure salvation. This is true not only as a matter of fact but also as a matter of experience. Even when the Lord Himself chastens us, it is most blessed to appeal against God to God. II. **HOW THE RIGHTEOUS AVAIL THEMSELVES OF THIS STRONG TOWER.** They run into it. They do not stop to make any preparation. And the running implies that they have nothing to carry; and that fear quickens them. When a man enters a castle, he is safe because of the impregnability of the castle, not because of the way in which he entered into the castle. III. **ENTERING THE STRONG TOWER IS A JOYOUS EXPERIENCE.** For "is safe" the margin reads "is set aloft." 1. This is a matter of fact. He is safe, for who can hurt him? Who has power to reach him? What weapon is there that can be used against him? 2. This is a matter of experience. The believer in his high days (and they ought to be every day) is like an eagle perched aloft on a towering crag. Yonder is a hunter down below, who would fain strike the royal bird; he has his rifle with him, but his rifle would not reach one-third of the way. So the royal bird looks down upon him in quiet contempt, not intending even to take the trouble to stretch one of his wings, for he is quite safe, he is up aloft. Such is the faithful Christian's state before God. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A place of refuge:*—In the ancient Greek states certain temples afforded protection to criminals, whom it was unlawful to drag from them, although the supply of food might be intercepted. As early as the seventh century the protection of sanctuary was afforded to persons fleeing to a church or certain boundaries surrounding it. . . . In several English churches there was a stone seat beside the altar, where those fleeing to the peace of the church were held to be guarded by its sanctity. (*Chambers' Encyclopædia.*) *The name of God a refuge:*—The name of God is his harbour, where he puts in as boldly as a man steps into his own house when taken in a shower. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Ver. 12. Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.—*Honour and humility.*—I. **EXPLAIN THE NATURE OF GENUINE HUMILITY.** 1. It does not consist in a mean and servile state of mind, in anything that is unworthy of the man or the Christian. Humility dignifies human nature; a spirit of servility degrades it. Some persons are naturally timid and faint-hearted. But this is mere human weakness. 2. It does not consist in indulging a low and dejected frame of mind, or in being pensive and sad on all occasions. Distance and reserve are so far from being the fruit of genuine humility, that they often proceed from pride and self-conceit. 3. There is what the Scriptures call a "voluntary humility" unrequired and unapproved. An apparently humble demeanour may consist with a haughty and aspiring spirit. 4. Genuine humility consists chiefly in the state of our hearts towards God. Here reason bows to faith, and interest to obligation. 5. Humility consists in thinking of ourselves as we ought to think, and conducting ourselves accordingly. 6. Our humility will appear in the sentiments we entertain of others, of the behaviour we manifest towards them. II. **THE HONOUR WITH WHICH CHRISTIAN HUMILITY IS ACCOMPANIED.** 1. It is the forerunner of just and worthy commendation. God exalts the low tree, and brings down the high. 2. Humility is a preparative for honour. A meek and quiet spirit is itself an ornament. It prepares the way for further honours. 3. Eternal honours shall be the gracious reward of true and genuine humility. God shall save the humble person. (*B. Beidome, M.A.*) *Humility:*—The text contains a most certain truth; and yet it is in its proper and most extensive sense a truth we owe to revelation. The natural man is not fond of believing in the necessity of humility. He contends for the dignity of his nature, he asserts the sufficiency of his own powers. Unaided man has been able to discover a considerable number of important truths in the theory of morals. With the polished nations of antiquity morals formed a part of the science of government. They examined into morals, and erected systems of morals, not with a view to ascertain and lay down the duties of the man, but of the citizen. The Christian cannot expect much assistance from this quarter. As they do not rest on the right foundation, or aim at the right end, the ancient ethics are miserably defective, and often grievously false. In no part are they more delusive than in the estimate they teach men to make of themselves. If we turn our eyes

upon the world around us, we shall readily find instances of the connection between pride and ruin. Pride leads men to make an offensive assumption of superiority. We know the infatuating nature of pride. It may be illustrated by the career of the first Napoleon. It is not less certain that "before honour is humility." Nothing more frequently leads men to situations of respect and eminence than modesty and diffidence. Every man of merit is so conscious of his deficiencies, he judges himself so severely, he adopts such an elevated standard of excellence, that he ever thinks hardly of himself. Thinking people know this, and give their verdict accordingly. And it is the thinking part of society that allot to a man his reputation. And humility has an effect upon the man himself, in whom it prevails. The sense of the smallness of his attainments will drive him to make large attainments. And thus, as the cause is before the effect, so before honour is humility. Now apply the text to the spiritual life. Both in what regards faith, and in what regards practice, pride inevitably leads to ruin. No one is likely to attain truth on spiritual subjects who approaches them in a spirit of pride. The man who depends on his intelligence, who examines the objects of faith in a self-sufficient spirit, is quite sure to fall into infidelity or error. If the man whose heart is haughty does get to entertain orthodox opinions of religious truth, his opinions cannot profit him: the truth must enter his heart as a living principle before it can be of personal benefit to him. The very first effect which it has on the heart is to bring down the reign of pride. Whenever pride reigns in a heart, there the kingdom of God is not set up. When a sinner passes from a state of impenitence to a state of grace, the whole process will be attended by humility. And there is no growth in grace, there is no safety, without humility. The more we know of ourselves the more cause we shall find for humility. Humility is our security. When he distrusts himself, and thinks meanly of himself, the Christian is in the state most favourable for his advancement in faith and holiness. (*J. G. Dowling, M.A.*)

Pride and humility.—When destruction walks through the land, it casts its shadow; it is in the shape of pride. When honour visits a man's house, it casts its shadow before it; it is in the fashion of humility. I. THE VICE OF PRIDE. 1. Describe pride. It is a groundless thing; a brainless thing; the maddest thing; a protean thing, ever changing its shapes. 2. The seat of pride. The true throne of pride is the heart of man. 3. The consequence of pride—destruction. II. THE GRACE OF HUMILITY. A good man may have honour in this life. But God forbids our making that honour a cloak for pride. 1. What is humility? To think rightly of ourselves. Humility is to make a right estimate of ourselves. It is no humility for a man to think less of himself than he ought. 2. What is the seat or throne of humility? It is the heart. I hate, of all things, the humility that lives in the face. Cringing men that bow before everybody are truly proud men; humble men think of themselves so little, they do not think it worth while to stoop to serve themselves. 3. What comes of humility? "Before honour is humility." Humility is the herald which ushers in the great King. He who has humility will have honour afterwards. Apply this spiritually. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?*—*Sustaining our infirmities*.—The sufferings of this life are not disproportioned to our strength to bear them. And the only evils that are intolerable and insupportable, are wholly owing to ourselves. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY SUSTAINING INFIRMITIES? Infirmities here, being opposed to a wounded spirit, must signify only external sufferings, whatever is grievous by afflicting, excepting the disorders and troubles of our own minds. By sustaining infirmities is not meant that we must not feel them. It is to feel but not sink under the weight of them: as that man sustains his burden who can go upright, and not stagger, or at least not fall, though he feels the weight of it on his shoulders. II. BY WHAT MEANS CAN THE SPIRIT OF A MAN SUSTAIN HIS INFIRMITIES? 1. By natural courage and strength of mind. There is an inbred greatness in human nature which does not care to confess its own weakness; an untought courage which supports the rude and illiterate part of mankind, even without reason and discourse. 2. By the power of reason, which adds to our natural courage, and gives us a more confirmed sense of decency and honour. The mere power of natural reason and moral arguments cannot support us under all events; but reason is the strength of the mind, and it is the mind which must bear up under external sufferings. Nature furnishes us with a great many arguments to bear sufferings easily, without fainting. 3. By the arguments which religion furnishes us with. Refer to two. That whatever we suffer is not

the effect of a blind chance or fatal necessity, but is ordered by a wise and good Providence. That if we bear our present sufferings with patience and submission to the will of God, and make a wise use of them to our improvement in grace and virtue, our very sufferings shall be greatly rewarded in the next world. If God sees pain and sickness, poverty and disgrace, necessary to cure or restrain our vicious and distempered passions, or to improve and exercise our graces, have we any reason to complain that God takes such severe measures to save our souls? This may be very grievous and afflicting at present, but then we have the hopes of immortal life to support us. III. WHAT IS MEANT BY "A WOUNDED SPIRIT"? This is a metaphorical expression, and signifies a spirit which suffers pain and trouble. A wound in the body is a division of one part from another, which is always painful; and though a spirit cannot be thus divided, yet because a wound causes pain, a spirit which is disordered and suffers pain is said to be wounded. Some men's spirits are wounded with the disorders and violence of their own passions. They love, or hope, or fear, or desire, or grieve immoderately; and all passions are very painful when they are in excess. Other men's spirits are wounded with a sense of guilt. Their own consciences reproach and shame them. IV. HOW UNSUPPORTABLE A WOUNDED SPIRIT IS! Anger, when it grows immoderate, worries the mind. An immoderate love of riches or honours or pleasures causes us infinite trouble, torments with an impatient thirst. All this is nothing to the agonies of a guilty mind. And moreover, a wounded spirit has no refuge or retreat, has nothing left to support itself with. The spirit of a man can bear his infirmities, but when the spirit itself is wounded, there is nothing to support that. This wounds our courage, our reason, makes all external comforts tasteless, and deprives us of all the comforts of religion. A wounded spirit cannot find any support from the considerations of religion unless it find its cure there. Useful thoughts: 1. This is a great vindication of the providence of God with respect to those evils and calamities that are in the world. God inflicts nothing on us but what the spirit of a man can sustain, but our greatest sufferings are owing to ourselves, and no more chargeable on the providence of God than our sins are. 2. This greatly recommends the Divine wisdom in that provision God has made for our support under sufferings. 3. It is better to suffer than to sin, even with respect to our present case, because sufferings may be borne by an innocent and virtuous mind. 4. The government of our own passions contributes more to our happiness than any external enjoyments. What a wrong course do the generality of mankind take to make themselves happy! They seek for happiness without, when the foundation of happiness must be laid within, in the temper and disposition of our minds. An easy, quiet mind will weather all the storms of fortune. But how calm and serene soever the heavens be, there is no peace to the wicked, who have nothing but noise and tumult and confusion within. (*W. Sherlock, D.D.*) *The burden of a wounded heart*.—This text presents a comparison between the grief that afflicts the outward man and that which preys upon the inward. What is meant in the text by "spirit"? In the soul of man is an upper and lower part; not, indeed, in respect of its substance, for that is indivisible, but in respect of its faculties. There is a higher and more noble portion of the soul, purely intellectual; and in operation, as well as in substance, perfectly spiritual, and this is expressed in the text by the term "spirit." What is the import of the soul being "wounded"? This signifies nothing else but its being deeply and intimately possessed with a lively sense of God's wrath for sin. The sense of the text lies full and clear in this one proposition, viz., that the trouble and anguish of a soul labouring under a sense of God's displeasure for sin is inexpressibly greater than any other grief or trouble whatsoever. I. WHAT KIND OF PERSONS ARE THE PROPER SUBJECTS OF THIS TROUBLE? Both the righteous and the wicked; but with a very different issue in one and in the other. II. WHEREIN DOES THE STRANGE, EXCESSIVE, AND SOMETIMES SUPERNATURAL GREATNESS OF IT APPEAR? We may gather this—1. From the behaviour of our Saviour Himself in this condition. 2. From the most raised and passionate expressions that have been uttered from time to time, by persons eminent in the ways of God, while they were labouring under it. 3. From the uninterrupted, incessant continuance of it. 4. From the violent and more than ordinary manifestation of itself in outward signs and effects. 5. From those horrid effects it has had upon persons not upheld under it by Divine grace. Both history and experience testify what tragical ends men deserted by God, under the troubles of a wounded spirit, have been brought into. III. BY WHAT WAYS AND MEANS THIS TROUBLE IS BROUGHT INTO THE SOUL. 1. By reflections upon the Divine justice, as provoked. 2. By fearful apprehensions of

the Divine mercy, as abused. 3. By God's withdrawing His presence and the sense of His love. 4. These wounding perplexities are brought upon the soul by God's giving commission to the tempter more than usually to trouble and disquiet it. IV. WHAT IS GOD'S END AND DESIGN IN CASTING MEN INTO SUCH A PERPLEXED CONDITION? God brings anguish upon the spirit of the pious and sincere for a twofold end. 1. To embitter sin to them. 2. To endear and enhance the value of returning mercy. V. DRAW SOME USEFUL INFERENCES FROM THE WHOLE. 1. Let no man presume to pronounce anything scoffingly of the present or severely of the final estate of such as he finds exercised with the distracting troubles of a wounded spirit. 2. Let no secure sinner applaud or soothe up himself in the presumed safety of his spiritual estate because he finds so much trouble or anguish upon his spirit for sin. 3. Let no person exclude himself from the number of such as are truly sincere and regenerate, only because he never yet felt any of these amazing pangs of conscience for sin. (*R. South.*) *On the wounds of the heart*:—There are two classes of good and evil belonging to man—those which respect his corporeal and those which respect his spiritual state. But it is not easy to convince men that the soul hath interests of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and is liable to diseases and wounds as real as any which the body suffers, and often much more grievous. The natural vigour and courage of a man's mind may enable him to surmount the ordinary distresses of life; but if, within him, the disease rankles in mind and heart, to what quarter can he look for relief? The spirit or soul of man is wounded chiefly by three causes—by folly, by passion, by guilt. I. BY FOLLY. That is, by vain, light, and improper pursuits; by a conduct which, though it should not be immediately criminal, yet is unsuitable to one's age, character, or condition in the world. Good sense is no less requisite in our religious and moral behaviour than it is in our worldly affairs. In this age of dissipation and luxury, how many avenues are open that lead to the Temple of Folly. If something happens to awaken persons of this description from their dreams of vanity, what mortifying and disquieting views of themselves will arise! Conscience now begins to exert its authority, and lift its scourge. II. BY PASSION. If by folly the spirit is wounded, it is exposed by passion to wounds still more severe. Passions are those strong emotions of the mind which impel it to desire, and to act, with vehemence. When directed towards proper objects, and kept within just bounds, they possess a useful place in our frame; but they always require the government and restraint of reason. When a man's passions have been so far indulged, and left to run to excess, a dangerous blow has been given to the heart. The balance of the soul is lost. The case becomes infinitely worse if the passion which has seized a man be of the vicious and malignant kind. Over his dark and scowling mind gloomy ideas continually brood. The wounds given to the heart by ill-governed passions are of an opprobrious nature, and must be stifled in secret. III. BY GUILT. If beyond being misled by folly or overcome by passion a man be conscious of having committed deeds of injustice or cruelty, deep and lasting is the sting which is sent into the heart. The voice of nature, of conscience, and of God will make itself heard within him. He will become despicable in his own sight. Remorse will prey the deeper on the bad man's heart, if it should happen that there was a period in his life when he was a different man. Then let us learn—1. To give the most serious and vigilant attention to the government of our hearts. 2. To join prayer to Almighty God, in addition to our own endeavours of guarding and governing our spirits. 3. That the great God hath already begun to punish bad men for their sins and vices. You see His hand in all that they are made to suffer by the “wounded spirit.” He has not delayed all retribution to another world. Let us hold fast by this truth, that every man's real happiness or misery is made by the appointment of the Creator, to depend more on Himself, and on the proper government of his mind and heart, than upon any external thing. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *The misery, causes, and remedies of a dejected mind*:—Render the passage thus: The spirit of a man (of a brave man) will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded (dejected) spirit, who shall raise it up? A caution is intimated against yielding too far to any misfortunes or troubles; against letting our spirits sink or our courage fail us in our day of calamity. A vigorous mind, a manly spirit, will support us under bodily infirmities within, or cross accidents without. The subject here is a troubled and dejected mind. I. THE MISERY OF IT. Not a wounded conscience only, but generally a mind wounded by grief and troubles. All manner of trouble and misery, as felt by the patient, is resolvable into pain of body or pain of mind; into some uneasy sensa-

tions, which we commonly call anguish. What an advantage, in all kinds of uneasinesses, to have a mind well fortified and steeled against them. Strength of mind and fortitude are of admirable use to repel uneasiness and pain, and to prevent its making any deep and durable impressions. The spirit of a man, while firm and erect, becomes a kind of armour of proof against either inward pains or untoward disasters. When the spirit sinks, every calamity puts on the blacker face, and every pain and uneasiness stings to the quick, and is much increased with galling reflections. The mind is haunted with dark images. The man sits down and indulges his sorrow, hugs his grief, abandons himself to impatience, bitter wailing, and despair, refusing to be comforted.

II. THE CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO THIS MELANCHOLY EXTREMITY. The occasional and immediate causes of this malady are either from without or from within. The outward calamities of life are many and various. A second cause is the sense of some grievous sin lying hard upon the conscience. The greatest calamity that can be is an ill-spent life. There is such a thing as religious melancholy—bodily indisposition, which is frequently the sole cause of a broken, dejected mind.

III. PRESCRIBE SOME PROPER REMEDIES OR PRESERVATIVES. Natural courage, inborn strength of mind, is one of the best preservatives. Rule 1. Trust in God and live a life conformable to the doctrine of Christ. 2. Sit as loose as possible to the world; weave and disentangle the affections from temporal things. If we can be content with a moderate share of temporal prosperity, we shall be the less concerned at disappointments, and of consequence the better prepared to meet afflictions and to bear up under them. Other inferior rules are, agreeable company; good books; employment in an honest calling; innocent diversions, and the like. Rely rather upon faith, a good life, and a good conscience consequent thereon; together with fixed and constant meditations upon the joys of a life to come. If ye do these things ye can never fail. (*D. Waterland, D.D.*)

A wounded spirit :—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY “A WOUNDED SPIRIT”? A guilty and self-condemning conscience arising both from a sense of sin and of the danger which a man by sinning has brought himself into. II. WHY IS A WOUNDED SPIRIT SO GRIEVOUS AND UNSUPPORTABLE? 1. It imports a sense of sin in offending against the light and conviction of our own minds. 2. In offending against the majesty of a gracious and good God. 3. A sense of danger in provoking the justice of an angry and avenging God. The spirits of men are often wounded, and their thoughts afflicted, at a sense of the present shame and sufferings which their evil courses bring upon them. The following are crimes which, in their own nature are attended with uneasy and stinging reflections: (1) Public offences against government and the common interests and good of society. (2) When the wrong-doer is under any obligations of love, fidelity, or obedience to those whom he injures. III. THOUGH THE CONDITION OF SUCH A PERSON IS SO DEPLORABLE, IT IS NOT HOPELESS OR DESPERATE. By the grace of God means are left for his recovery. That faith which, according to the terms of the gospel, justifies a sinner, and is reckoned unto him for righteousness, imports a firm belief that Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world, and that His sufferings and death upon the Cross were a true and proper expiatory sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. Let us apply the benefits of that general expiation Christ made for the sins of mankind to our particular persons. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*)

Sustaining infirmity :—I. A SOUND SPIRIT IS WHAT WILL RELIEVE UNDER OUTWARD INFIRMITIES AND TROUBLES. 1. When may the spirit of a man be said to be sound? When it is renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God. A holy soul is a healthful one. There is a natural soundness or stoutness of spirit which is not easily discouraged or broken by external trouble or pain. There is a moral soundness of spirit when enlightened conscience hath nothing gross to upbraid a man withal. A sound spirit is one pardoned through the blood of Jesus, and through Him restored to the favour of God. It is in some measure comforted with a sense of God's love, and its own safety for eternity. 2. Show that every man has his infirmities. “Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.” “Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.” The term “infirmity” denotes what afflictions are, both in their nature and tendency, viz., weakening things. And man has no ability to prevent their coming, nor to free himself from them when they come. 3. How far will a sound spirit sustain under these? The man does not hereby become insensible. But a sound spirit will be a praying one; it will not let go its hope in God of a blessed issue, either in this world or a better; it will keep something of cheerfulness. This sound spirit is not alone; it has the Spirit of God with it. And this Spirit proves a comforter and helper, by leading the afflicted Christian into an acquaintance with what is

written in the Word, and what has been wrought within himself. II. A WOUNDED SPIRIT IS ITSELF A BURDEN, UNDER WHICH THERE IS NO STANDING WITHOUT RELIEF GIVEN FROM HEAVEN. 1. The spirit or soul in man may be wounded. There is such a thing as a grieved soul as well as a pained body. There is a bitterness peculiar to the heart which can only be understood by God and itself. A wounded spirit is one filled with anguish from a sense of sin. 2. When, and in whom, may the spirit be wounded. Either before conversion or after. The soul of the sinner is wounded that Christ may be rendered precious and amiable to it, and bring it to close with Him upon His own terms; that it might be filled with a greater hatred of sin; that, when it is healed, it may be the more enlarged in thankfulness towards its gracious God. The distress of a wounded spirit will for ever be an argument of love to God and Christ, and it will put others upon considering what they are liable to suffer on account of sin in this world, besides the death which is the wages of it in another. The spirit is wounded in such as God is about to recover to Himself, to make and keep them humble all their days. By the distress that goes before recovering grace God will encourage His people's trust in Him in after-trials. What compassion is due to such as know by experience the insupportable burden of a wounded spirit! (*D. Wilcox.*) *A wounded spirit*:—Writing of General Grant's last days, General Badeau says: "The physicians constantly declared that although the cancer was making irresistible advance, it was not the cancer that produced the exhaustion and nervousness which, unless arrested, would bring about death very soon. It was only too plain that the mental, moral disease was killing Grant—it was the blow which had struck him to the dust, and humiliated him before the world, from which he could not recover. He who was thought so stolid, so strong, so undemonstrative, was dying for a sentiment—because of the injury to his fame, the aspersions on his honour." (*J. F. B. Tinling.*) *The torture of a wounded conscience*:—As long as Adam maintained a conscience pure towards God, he was happy; but having once taken the forbidden fruit, he tarried a while there, but took no contentment therein; the sun did shine as bright, the rivers ran as clear as ever they did, birds sang as sweetly, beasts played as pleasantly, flowers smelt as fragrant, herbs grew as fresh, fruits flourished as fair; no punctilio of pleasure was either altered or abated; the objects were the same, but Adam's eyes were otherwise. Such is the torture of a wounded conscience, that it is able to unparadise paradise, and the burthen thereof so insupportable, that it is able to quell the courage and crush the shoulders of the hugest Hercules, of the mightiest man upon the face of the earth: who can bear it? (*J. Spencer.*) *Grievances of the spirit*:—These are of all others most heavy and grievous to be borne; these make sore the shoulders which should sustain the other infirmities. If the spirit be wounded by the disturbance of the reason, dejection under the trouble, whatever it is, and despair of relief; if the spirit be wounded by the amazing apprehensions of God's wrath for sin, and the fearful expectations of judgment and fiery indignation, who can bear this? Wounded spirits cannot help themselves, nor do others know how to help them. It is therefore wisdom to keep conscience void of offence. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Vers. 15, 16. **The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge.**—*The attainment of knowledge and the power of kindness*:—I. THE ATTAINMENT OF KNOWLEDGE. "The heart of the prudent getteth knowledge," &c. It is suggested by the words that the attainment of knowledge requires two things. 1. A heart for it. "The heart of the prudent." There must, at least, be in every "heart," a consciousness of its need. The opinionated, self-sufficient man, who is wise in his own conceit, will never get knowledge. Though the sun of knowledge shine around him, its beams cannot enter him. All the shutters of his mental house are so closed by self-sufficiency that no rays can enter. A sense of ignorance is the first step to the attainment of knowledge. 2. An effort for it. "The ear of the wise seeketh knowledge." The ear is one of the great inlets. Wisdom does not come into the soul unless it is searched for as a "hidden treasure." Whilst all this is true of general knowledge, it is especially true of Divine knowledge. II. THE POWER OF KINDNESS. "A man's gift maketh room for him and bringeth him before great men." There are two kinds of gifts, the gift of selfishness and the gift of kindness. A man sometimes bestows a favour on another in order to get back something of a higher value. This gift is a bribe. The gift of kindness is the true gift and the real power. It makes room for the giver in the heart of the receiver, and it bringeth him before truly great men. Great men recognise and honour the generous. 1. Kind-

ness is the mightiest power. 2. Kindness is the Divinest power. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) **A man's gift maketh room for him.**—*Giving: a study in Oriental manners*.—In the East the custom of giving gifts affects all the relationships of life—domestic, social, commercial, political, and religious. It is difficult in lands of law-defended liberty, democratic representation, and freedom of the press to realise how much is awaiting where these are absent, and how great an importance comes to be attached to the means and resources by which, when right cannot be legally enforced, promises may nevertheless obtain fulfilment, the indifferent be made interested, the alienated reconciled, and the powerful and rich become considerate and gracious. It is in this connection that the giving and receiving of gifts plays a prominent part. Amid much variety as to the occasions of giving, and the character of the things given, there are two principal uses. The first and fundamental meaning is affectionate and sincere, and owes its popularity to the warm and impulsive feelings of the people within a certain area. It is the expression and proof of the sincerity of love (2 Cor. viii. 8). The second is utilitarian. "A man's gift maketh room for him." The abounding hypocrisy that surrounds this second meaning is a tribute to the reality and strength of the original affectionate meaning thus simulated. For illustration we must turn to the circumstances in Oriental life that make gift-giving popular and expedient. To the visitor to the East, beset on all hands by demands for *backshish*, "a present," the principle of gift-giving seems to be the summary of Oriental life and all its institutions.

I. **FAMILY LIFE.** Here the giving of gifts is pleasant and unconstrained: the proof of the abundance rather than merely the sincerity of love. Special occasions are birth, betrothal, marriage, recovery from sickness, and return of a member of the family from a journey. Money is freely given and lent, the refusal of it being considered shameful, and causing alienation not easily forgotten. A favourite gift is that of jewellery or clothing taken from the person and given to a friend to be a constant memorial of the absent, and a proof that he will be treasured in the heart even as his body is now encased in the clothes of his friend.

II. **SOCIAL LIFE.** Public life is conducted, as far as possible, on family lines. The family is not merely an inner circle of affectionate devotion; it is also a guild of common interests. A daughter is, if possible, married among her relatives. A father putting his son in a shop or office says to the manager, "He is your son," implying complete authority over him and regard also for his welfare. The Oriental laws of neighbourhood teaching sympathy, toleration, and helpfulness spring from the family. The conditions of industrial life and the patriarchal form of government have further tended to develop the habit of giving gifts, making an affectionate act the means of attaining mercenary ends, and leading the way to bribery, intrigue, and dishonesty. The Oriental landowner has always paid his labourers in kind—giving them a certain portion of the produce. It is a gift out of what is his personal estate. The sheikh or emir of the leading family further protected the peasantry from the marauding Bedouin, "the children of the East," and presents given to him were a grateful acknowledgment of protection and prosperity. Such gifts, putting the receiver in the position of a benefactor, easily took the form of blackmail, and the omission of them was a grave discourtesy. Thus David regarded Nabal after having protected his shepherds. Starting from the simple conditions of pastoral and industrial life, the habit became resorted to wherever dignity had to be flattered or favourable intervention was needed. To the Oriental litigant the chief thing is to obtain the judge's personal favour, and a present to him seems a more direct and effective outlay than feeing counsel and collecting witnesses. Even when the judge is known to be intelligent and upright, Orientals pay respect and send presents to the personal friends of the judge in order that they may use their influence with him. Thus, even under the rule of David, Absalom could spread sedition and discontent by declaring how he would revolutionise the administration of the land. Absolute freedom from this taint was a chief item in Samuel's testimony as to his own official life.

III. **RELIGION.** The claims of religion are much more intimately interwoven with common affairs in the East than they are in the West. There is nothing of Sunday segregation. All business prosperity is publicly declared to be from God, whatever may be the means taken to obtain it. Two sentences especially are often seen written over shop doors, "Prosperity is in God's hand," and "This is also from the grace of my Lord." Street beggars recognise this, and pause for a gift when they see a purchase being effected. Something is due to them as a share of the profits from the same Lord. A beggar at the door does not plead his poverty or attempt to explain his circumstances, but pronounces

the name of God, and says, "I am a guest at your door!" and if the door is not opened calls aloud, "You are also servants!" The beggar is seldom dismissed from the door with the declaration that there is nothing for him. He is told, "God will give you." Similarly, the constant cry at the side of the street is, "God will bless you"; "God will direct your path"; "God will repay it." The custom of giving gifts in its best and most sincere applications thus has its origin in duty to the family and indebtedness to God. Its adaptation to more social and public relationships is the result of these two. Indifference to family honour and the claims of religion makes the "profane person" or "fool" of the Bible. The unjust judge (Luke xviii. 1-8) is sharply silhouetted by the omission of these two principal regards. Orientally there was no third position such as that of an official acting justly for the sake of justice, although atheistical and immoral in personal life. (G. M. Mackie, M.A.)

Ver. 17. He that is first in his own cause seemeth just.—*The bias on the side of self*:—This proverb touches human life at many points, and human beings feel it touching them. It accords with common experience. It is true to nature—nature fallen and distorted. It does not apply to humanity in innocence. It has no bearing on the new nature in a converted man. This Scripture reveals a crook in the creature that God made upright. Self-love is the twist in the heart within, and self-interest is the side to which the variation from righteousness steadily tends. A man's interest is touched by the word or deed of another; forthwith he persuades himself that what is against his own wish is also against righteousness, and argues accordingly. He states his own case, but he leans over to one side, and sees everything in a distorted form. His case is both a sin and a blunder. In the statement of your case do you permit a selfish desire for victory to turn your tongue aside from the straight line of truth? There is room for improvement here, and improvement here would tell upon the world. If a man can detect exaggerations on one side and concealments on the other, amounting to untruthfulness in their general effect, it shows that the fear of God was not before the eyes of the witness when he omitted his evidence. To walk with God in the regeneration is the short and sure way to rigid truth in all your intercourse with men. The adversary will find nothing if a greater than he has been there before him. (W. Arnot, D.D.)

Ver. 19. A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city.—*Physical power and moral power*:—In the early life of men and communities, the power most admired is physical power. Those who can conquer in the material world are the heroes of the young. Later, men think more of intellectual achievements. The greatest in the schools is the greatest in the world. In the maturest stage of life we are content with less conspicuous feats; for we see that the less may be greater. We deem it greater to conquer in the realm of moral life than in the field of nature or the area of intellect. The conqueror in the field of battle may be great, but the conqueror of the hearts of men is greater. A brother offended may be harder to win than the bars of a castle, but so much the nobler is the victory. To win men is a nobler achievement than the defeat of men's bodies or the confounding of their minds. (Bp. Boyd Carpenter.) *Discords among brethren*:—No discords are like those of brethren; the nearer the union, the greater the separation upon a breach; for natural ties being stronger than artificial, when they are once broken, they are hardly made up again, as seams when they are ripped may be sown again; but rents in the whole cloth are not so easily remedied. (H. G. Salter.)

Ver. 21. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.—*The power of speech*:—Of all the powers that man possesses there is scarcely any more awful than the power of speech. It is a God-like power. Human speech is no mere evolution from the cry of the animals. Speech became possible on the earth only when on the earth there appeared one into whom the Divine Spirit had breathed the breath of life, and made him a living soul. It is because the origin of speech is Divine that words have such awful power. Consider what a word is. From the materialist's point of view, it is but a slight agitation of the particles of air around us. Nothing feeble, nothing more evanescent, can be conceived. Yet that word can make or mar a human life; that word can fill a home with gladness or despair. **I. DEATH IS IN THE POWER OF THE TONGUE.** How significant it is of the fallen condition of our race that death should here be put first! To prove the truth of our text, let us take some illustrations of the death-dealing power of the tongue.

1. Take the deadly power of careless, vain, frivolous words. They seem harmless. How much harm is done by the light and careless conversation even of Christian people about religion! How much damage is done by the far too common habit of jesting with Scripture! Such a habit induces irreverence, and lays the foundation for irreligion. 2. Take the deadly power of mocking words. A gibe, a sneer, cuts many a man like a knife. By the mocking words of companions many a soul who has just escaped has been forced back into the bondage of sin, and driven to a Christless grave. 3. As a graver illustration of the same thing, take the power of false words. While open and deliberate lying is reprobated by all, many have not a sufficient sense of the mischief wrought by falsehood and insincerity of speech. Every lie begets other lies; and from the thoughtless exaggerations of conversation to the deliberate perjury, which has in our day become so common in our law courts, the descent is quick and easy. 4. A still more serious illustration of the death-dealing power of the tongue is seen in connection with slander. Says Robertson, of Brighton, in a great sermon upon the tongue, "In the drop of poison which distils from the sting of the smallest insect, or the spikes of the nettle leaf, there is concentrated the quintessence of a poison so subtle that the microscope cannot distinguish it, yet so virulent that it can inflame the blood, irritate the whole system, and convert night and day into a restless misery. So it is in the power of slanderous words to inflame hearts, to fever human existence, to poison human society at the fountain springs of life." 5. But the supreme illustration of the death-dealing power of the tongue is found in indecent words. The man of indecent speech may be compared with the murderer. The one destroys the body, the other destroys the soul. If we would execrate the man who in the time of pestilence would smear the walls of a city with plague-poison, what shall we say of the man who defiles the temple of the soul with his indecent speech? To thousands and tens of thousands indecent speech is the revelation of a world of wickedness previously unknown. By it the imagination is defiled, the corrupt nature set on fire, the barriers that guard purity broken down, and the soul led to absolute ruin. II. LIFE IS IN THE POWER OF THE TONGUE. When the tongue is consecrated, when it is guided and controlled by a heart full of the Holy Ghost, it becomes a mighty power to destroy the works of the devil. 1. Grave and gracious speech takes the place of careless, light, and frivolous speech. Our words lead seekers to Christ, in Him to find eternal life. 2. Comforting and encouraging words take the place of mocking words. The power of words of comfort to encourage those who are sorrowing and desponding is simply marvellous. They literally bring life to the soul. 3. Kind words take the place of cruel words. Every kind word that is uttered makes this world more like heaven. For where slander begets hate, kindness begets love. 4. True words go forth to do battle against the falsehoods of which the earth is full. Every true word that is spoken binds human society more closely together, and makes the burden of life easier to bear. 5. And then pure words go forth to enlighten and purify and cleanse lives darkened and debased and defiled by the evils of the world. Before the man of pure speech the indecent man hides himself. Purity is like the sunlight. When it is let in upon the mind the evil and unclean things which dwell there flee, as noisome creatures under a stone flee from the light of day. But what is true of the tongue is true also of the pen. Literature to-day has a tremendous power. And who doubts that in countless instances it is a power making for death? (1) Who can estimate the damage done by the innumerable frivolous and absolutely worthless books which are issued from the press? Even where they are not positively harmful, they waste time. (2) And if these are hurtful, how much more so are the false and misleading books which are issued in such numbers in our day! (3) But the death-dealing power of the press is seen in nothing so dreadfully as in its issue of impure and indecent literature. But if the press has such power, and if authors are using this power for evil, it becomes all the more necessary that we should use it for good. A good book entering a house may prevent the entrance of a bad book. A good book following a bad book may largely neutralise the mischief which the first has done. (*G. H. C. Macgregor, M.A.*) *The power of the tongue:*—The faculty of speech is one of the very highest faculties with which we have been endowed. Great is its value to man as an intelligent and social being, and great is the weight of responsibility which is implied by the impression of it. Yet the Hebrew sage appears to have exceeded the fair limit allowable even to hyperbole when he says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Yet there is nothing but what is strictly accurate in this sentence. Literally the words are.

"Death and life are in the hand of the tongue." The author represents this faculty as a living thing—as the arbiter of good and ill, as the disposer of human fortune.

I. SEE THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT IN ITS APPLICATION TO THE PRESENT LIFE. As a maxim of common prudence the words deserve attention. There are some persons who never speak well of others. And fatal often is their cruel activity. Reverse the picture, and see happiness smiling about the man who speaks of others in the language of justice, and gentleness, and charity. Wherever he can he will bear his testimony to the integrity and good character of others. But our proverb does not merely apply to extreme cases, such as these. When a man speaks in mere thoughtlessness, there may be those hearing him on whom his very random words may be falling as a balm, or as a poison. If we set any value upon the happiness and comfort of others, it becomes us to set a watch over our mouth. What we say is a most important influence on our own condition in this world, because our condition is greatly affected by what others think of us, and we know full well that it is not easy to struggle against the difficulties created by a bad character. The estimation in which we are held is very greatly affected by our words.

II. SEE THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT IN ITS BEARING UPON OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION. Spiritual death is the frequent and melancholy effect of the impious efforts of some men's tongues. But life, too, is in the power of the tongue. The cause of God has never been without its noble band of witnesses. Important, however, as may be the effects of what we say on others, they cannot be greater than they are upon ourselves. A word may determine our condition for ever. Prayers, praises, and holy conversation, cannot be in vain—nor can curses, and railing, and idle talk, be in vain. It is greatly to be feared that we may find much that is amiss in ourselves, when we press our consciences with the question, Have we acted as those who believed that death and life are in the power of the tongue? (*J. G. Douling, M.A.*)

The tongue, or well-speaking:—As in the physical, so in the moral, the tongue is the criterion of the hidden and eternal man. Self-government alone can conform men to Christ, and there is no self-government where the tongue is untamed.

I. THE TONGUE IS A GREAT BLESSING. The gift of speech is a valuable boon. The animal creation have it not. In man's case, mind utters itself through matter. Spirit speaks through clay. Blessed boon, the gift of speech!—the richest melody of creation, the music of nature, the life of poetry, the vehicle of common sense, the incarnation of the soul's contemplations.

II. THE TONGUE IS THE SERVANT OF THE HEART. Strictly, the tongue never speaks at random. The tongue is the criterion of the moral man. A diseased or healthy heart is thereby truthfully advertised. While the mind is the standard of the man, the tongue is the standard of the mind. The apostle James regarded a wholesome tongue in so important a light that he came to the conclusion, "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." With him it involved such mortification of nature, such growth in goodness, and such constant self-government, that he regarded the man who had mastered his lips as not far from perfection. Idle words betray a mind waste, worthless, and uncultivated; severe words, a mind savage and malicious; angry words, a mind set on fire of hell; whispering words, a mind cast in the mould of Judas; boasting or disparaging words, a mind stuffed with self-conceit; false and deceitful words, a mind which he who was a liar from the beginning has usurped as his pleasure-ground. Thus our daily sayings are our daily selves, and our words testify our inmost thoughts.

III. THE TONGUE SPOILED BY SIN IS EMPHATICALLY THE STRONGHOLD OF SATAN. No member of the body has done Satan more service than the tongue. Through all generations, how many of the best and most useful men have been assailed by calumnies. The sensual tongues, the flattering tongues, the sceptical tongues of bad men, and the strife of tongues among good men, have shown Satan to be the lord of language. The tongue is God's organ, but beware lest the devil play upon it till in death it cyphers and is heard no more.

IV. THE TONGUE CAN ONLY BE CURED BY THE HABITUAL CONTEMPLATION OF CHRIST. It is by looking unto Him, the author and finisher of our faith, by closely studying His excellences, and getting full of His Spirit, that we effectually keep the door of our lips against every ungodly and unamiable intruder. The tongues of Christians should be eminently instructive. They should also be comforters. And they should be, at proper times, reprovers. Keep the door of your lips. Be slow to speak, slow to wrath. (*Mortlock Daniel.*)

The use and abuse of speech:—Religion requires much more than mere outward decency or refinement of manners. We gather from Scripture that we should order our speech with a view to the benefit of our fellow-creatures and the promotion of the glory of God.

We must have regard to the moral character and consequences of our speech. Many people abuse the power of the tongue so incessantly that they cease to be aware what a depraved state of heart is thereby indicated. Inasmuch as God hears and notes our sayings, we bring good or evil upon our souls according to the manner in which the power of the tongue is employed. Speech forms part of character. There is an inseparable connection between what we say and what we think. Each man's conversation has a distinct personality from which it cannot be divested. Thought awakens feeling, and feeling induces utterance. When a man speaks his character passes into action. By our words our own immortal future is affected, and we are continually exercising an influence upon the welfare of our neighbours. The power of the tongue is infinitely reproductive. Its effects are incalculable. And the guidance of our speech is a matter which deeply concerns us. Few of us can look back upon the past without a consciousness of having offended much with the tongue. The consideration of this subject shows the necessity of a gracious renewal of the heart. (*A. B. Whatton, LL.B.*) *The tongue an agency of good or evil*.—The tongue is a member which God has used to produce great misery or great blessing. As soon as thought is embodied in language, it assumes the form of a living engine. I. THE ENGINE OF COUNSEL. If men be asked for counsel or advice, they can give it only in proportion to the knowledge they possess. Illustrate from the counsel given by the master of a family or by a public teacher. II. THE ENGINE OF SLANDER. Slanderers include the backbiter, the gossip, the keen anatomist. The mind of man is by nature eminently fitted for becoming the engine of slander. III. AS THE ENGINE OF FLATTERY. Men are more ready to forgive an ill done to them than an ill said of them. Men often entertain a higher respect for individuals who flatter them than for those who confer upon them a substantial benefit. There is such a thing as religious flattery. Even an advance in spiritual attainments may engender spiritual pride. Where there is spiritual prosperity there is a risk of becoming spiritually vain. (*H. Melvill.*) *The power of the tongue*.—Intellectual, spiritual, social, and political life and death are in the tongue. Apply the proverb—I. TO THE CHRISTIAN IN GENERAL. He prays with the tongue. He confesses with the tongue. He converses with the tongue. II. TO THE PREACHER OF THE GOSPEL. The tongue of a true gospel minister produces life intentionally. The tongue of a true gospel minister may produce death incidentally. III. TO THE SAVIOUR OF MEN. This is true of Him as a Teacher, as an Advocate, and as a Judge. Learn the awful responsibility attached to speech. Burnet says of the incomparable Leighton, "In a free and frequent conversation with him for twenty-two years, I never heard him utter an idle word, or a word that had not a direct tendency to edification." (*John Sibree.*) *Partisan misrepresentation*.—Three forms of misrepresentation may be indicated—1. The suppression of facts essential to a right estimate of character. This is perhaps the most usual and most dangerous form of the evil. "No lie is so dangerous as a half-truth." 2. The accepting of unverified rumour for fact. He who does this becomes an indorser of the rumour. A premium is thereby placed upon slander. 3. Direct fabrication of known falsehood. The evils of such misrepresentation are lasting and obvious. (1) It defiles the individual, blunts his sense of honour and justice, numbs his conscience, and weakens his moral influence over his fellows. (2) It is a crime against one's country. (3) It is a sin before God. In the thunders of Sinai it was condemned. Christ Himself was the victim of partisan misrepresentation. (*Homiletic Review.*)

Ver. 22. *Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord.*—*A happy marriage*.—At the outset these words strike two thoughts on our attention. 1. That celibacy is not the best mode of social life. Solomon means to say that it is a good thing to have a wife. Even in the state of innocence it was not good for man to be alone. "Celibate," says Bishop Taylor, "like the fly in the heart of an apple, dwells in perpetual sweetness, but sits alone, and is confined and dies in singularity; but marriage, like the useful bee, builds a house and gathers sweetness from every flower, and labours and unites into societies and republics, and sends out colonies and feeds the world with delicacies, and obeys their king and keeps order, and exercises many virtues, and promotes the interests of mankind, and is that state of good things to which God hath designed the present constitution of the world." 2. That monogamy is the true marriage. Solomon does not say, "He that findeth wives," but "He that findeth a wife." Though Solomon had many wives, he nowhere justified plurality. Duality appears everywhere, and throughout the universe is necessary. The text in its completeness teaches—

I. THAT A GOOD WIFE IS A GOOD THING. Of a good wife, of course, the writer must be supposed to speak, for a bad wife is a bad thing. Manoaah found a good thing in his wife (Judg. iii. 13). The patriarch of Uz does not seem to have found a good thing in his (Job ii. 9, 10). "A good wife" must be—1. A good woman. A woman of chaste loves, incorruptible virtues, and godly sympathies and aims. 2. A suitable companion. A good woman would not be a good wife to all men. There must be a mutual fitness, a fitness of temperament, taste, habits, culture, associations. II. A GOOD WIFE IS A DIVINE GIFT. "Obtaineth favour of the Lord." All good things are His gifts. Young men, be cautious of your choice of a companion for life. "When Themistocles was to marry his daughter, there were two suitors, the one rich and a fool, and the other wise but not rich; and being asked which of the two he had rather his daughter should have, he answered, 'I had rather she should marry a man without money than money without a man.' The best of marriage is in the man or woman, not in the means or the money." (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 24. **A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly.**—*Duties to equals, neighbours, friends, husband, and wife*:—The carriage of equals to one another should be friendly and equal on both sides. Almost every relation gives love and benevolence a new cast and form, and calls for a new set of officers, new either for kind, measure, or manner. I. DUTIES TO THOSE WHO ARE NEIGHBOURS IN SITUATION TO ONE ANOTHER. So far as consists with the care of our own spiritual preservation and with all our engagements elsewhere, the sum of what we owe to our neighbours is to be as kind, useful, and beneficent among them as possible, strictly avoiding what may be to the hurt of any. To be courteous on all occasions of converse, and to be ready to do and return those good offices which tend to mutual protection and accommodation. We should strive to promote virtue and goodness in the places of our respective residence. II. THE DUTIES OF FRIENDSHIP. Friendship arises from a voluntary agreement or choice of persons, in other respects independent, to cultivate a familiar correspondence together. Contracting alliances is not properly a moral obligation, but rather a matter of private convenience and pleasure. Let the first rule be, to be agreed on the terms, and neither to raise nor take up expectations beyond the just intention and import of them. The second is for a person to use his utmost endeavours to answer the confidence he has suffered another to repose in him. Fidelity must be strictly maintained. A third duty is to observe a decency and respectfulness in our own language and behaviour to them, together with a candid interpretation of their words and actions. A fourth rule is that all flattery must be banished from friendship. III. THE DUTIES OF BROTHERS AND SISTERS. This relation is formed by nature itself. Nature, reason, and Scripture dictate that there should be a peculiar affection, with very kind effects of it, passing between those that are thus related together. Brethren should be specially careful to cultivate peace among themselves. IV. THE DUTIES OF THE CONJUGAL RELATION. A relation which comprehends all the sweets and endearments of the strictest friendship. The duties are—1. Love to each other's persons. 2. A strict care about maintaining peace. 3. The inviolable preservation of conjugal fidelity; a bond of equal obligation on the husband and on the wife. 4. Constant effort to promote each other's interest as one common interest. The husband's authority should be full of tenderness, condescension, and forbearance. (J. Hubbard.) *Human and Divine friendship*:—Here is a comprehensive doctrine of Christian friendship. Friendship is a principle of mutual interchange and mutual sacrifice. There can be no oneness, no selfish engrossment, no taking without giving. Selfishness is the death of social reciprocity and sympathy, as it is of piety to God. Christianity is not an abstraction. It is all in a person with every attribute of personal life and love. About all our other friendships there are some easily-reached and sorely-felt limitations. Turn, then, to the One Friend. His friendship never fails or disappoints for want of knowledge, or patience, or skill, or strength, or endurance. Putting together the two declarations of the text—that of the Christian lawfulness and mutual blessing of human friendship with that of the supreme attraction and fidelity of the Divine friendship of the Saviour, we have the ground for two or three great practical principles of almost universal application. 1. The Christian guidance we need in the choice of friends and the formation of friendships. 2. The Christian test of every friendship and every affection. 3. The Christian direction how to hold and handle these friendships so that they shall bear their part and yield their fruit in the ripening of character and the eternal life of

the soul. (*Ep. Huntington, D.D.*) *Man's clinging Friend* :—I. THE RELATIONSHIP OF A BROTHER. A brother does sometimes stick close. The ties of blood are the last thing which prevents us from sinking into selfish atoms, or hardening into mere machines for minting money. Each relationship in the family has its own blessed meaning and duty. Brothers feel that their descent from one stock begets mutual alliances and obligations. But sometimes the links of brotherhood are broken. A brother in blood has sometimes been unbrotherly in will and in deed. II. THE MORE THAN BROTHERHOOD OF A BOSOM FRIEND. Probably the majority of men have friends nearer to them than blood-relations. Our kin are not always kind, whereas our friend is always our brother. There are less occasions for bickerings between friends than between brothers. Our friend is not with us constantly, and friendship loses none of its gloss by over-frequent contact. The superiority of friendship over brotherhood is due mostly to the fact that a "brother" may be a being apart, while a "friend" is a second self. Friends are one in kind, "moulded like in nature's mint." The true melodic charm of friendship lies in the devotion of both friends to the service of Christ. III. THE FRIEND MORE THAN A BROTHER CAN BE NO OTHER THAN JESUS CHRIST. Christ alone has those elements of character which can make Him the clinging Friend. (*F. G. Collier.*) *Friendship* :—Man is a social being. Religion sanctions and encourages the unions to which nature prompts. Friendship has its inner and its remoter circles. The heart craves for intimate friends—those to whom it can confide its innermost thoughts, and to whom it can repair for sympathy and help in times of trouble. We have here the way to make friends and the strength of a true friendship. I. THE WAY TO MAKE FRIENDS. Reciprocity is the soul of friendship. No man can expect to be long cherished as a friend who does not reciprocate the feeling. At the basis of friendship must be confidence. You must place confidence in the man whom you desire to place confidence in you. Another essential ingredient of friendship is fidelity to the trust reposed in you. If you would wish others to be faithful to you, you must be faithful to them; you must never make that public which was intended to be private. Friendship involves the discharge of all the kind offices of sympathy and help. If you would wish others to sympathise with you in your troubles, you must be ever ready to sympathise with them. This is the way in which we are to make friends. We are to be to others what we wish them to be to us. II. THE STRENGTH OF A TRUE FRIENDSHIP. The words of the text are emphatically, but not exclusively, true of Jesus Christ. They here express a fact of ordinary experience. The ties of a true friendship are stronger than the ties of the closest natural relationship. In the absence of friendship the ties of nature are often very slender. 1. This is seen in times of adversity. 2. In times of moral delinquency and degradation. 3. A friend will encounter sacrifices and sufferings from which a brother will often shrink. All that can be said about friendship when it exists between man and man is unspeakably more true when applied to Jesus Christ. We may learn from this—1. The reason why many men are without friends. It is because they do not show themselves friendly. 2. That the best friend you can have offers you His friendship. And He makes the first advance. 3. Next to having Jesus Christ as your friend, the best friendships you can form will be with those who are in fellowship with Him. Then strive to make friends. (*A. Clark.*) *Companionship versus friendship* :—The word rendered "friend" is from a root which means "to delight in." The word might be rendered "lover." In the former clause of the verse read "companions," in the latter clause "friend." Then read the verse thus—"A man of companions breaks himself up, but there is a Friend more attached than a brother." I. THE SAFEGUARD OF COMPANIONSHIP. 1. Indiscriminate companionships may meet with ingratitude. 2. They may involve injustice. 3. They may produce infidelity. II. THE SATISFACTIONS OF FRIENDSHIP. 1. Friendship's inspiration is to a higher purpose than companionship's. 2. Its impulse is to a more unselfish relationship. 3. Its industry is seen in assuring a more enduring attachment. (*C. M. Jones.*) *Friendship* :—I propose to treat of friendship, which is one of the noblest and, if I might use such an expression, the most elegant relation of which human nature is capable. It tends unspeakably to the improvement of the mind, and the pleasures which result from it are most sincere and delightful. It is an observation of the best writers that friendship cannot subsist but between persons of real worth, for friendship must be founded upon high esteem; but such esteem cannot be—at least it cannot be rational and lasting—where there is not true moral worth. This is the proper object of esteem, and no natural advantages will do without it. Besides, in

friendship there must be a certain likeness and content of soul, a content in the great ends and views of life, and also in the principal methods and conduct of it, and this content is effectually begotten and secured only by true probity and goodness; this is the same in every one, and forms the mind into the same sentiments, and gives it the same views and designs in all the most important affairs of life. Good spirits, therefore, are kindred spirits, and resemble one another. But what is principally to be considered is this, that no friendship can bind a man to do an ill thing. Friendship, then, must be built upon the principles of virtue and honour; and cannot subsist otherwise. But, in truth, a bad man is not capable of being a friend; there is a certain greatness of soul, a benevolence, a faithfulness, an ingenuity, necessary to friendship, which are absolutely inconsistent with a bad moral character. But though every true friend be a good man, yet every good man is not fit to be a friend. A person's character may be, in general, a good one, and yet he may want many qualities which are necessary to friendship; such as—1. *Generosity*. Friendship abhors everything that is narrow and contracted. 2. To generosity must be added tenderness of affection. Jonathan loved David as his own soul. The friendly mind does, with great tenderness, enter into all the circumstances and sentiments of his companion; can be affected with all his cares and fears, his joys and sorrows. Everything is of importance to him that is so to his friend. And this tenderness of affection begets that strange but affecting harmony of souls, if I might term it so, like the cords of two musical instruments strained to the same key, where if one of them is touched any wise, the sound is communicated to the other. Where there is true friendship there must be an exquisite mutual feeling. 3. And when I have said that the affection must be tender, this is saying too that it must be undissembled. Sincerity in love is essential. 4. I add that there must be in friendship great openness and frankness of spirit; there must be a communication of secrets, without reserve; unless that reserve necessarily arises from and is caused by friendship, for this sacred relation cannot bear any other. 5. But although a friend must be ingenuous and open-hearted, a man of simplicity, and whose very heart, if I might use the expression, is transparent to his friend, yet he must be discreet and prudent; capable of concealing from others what ought to be concealed; capable of managing, in anything that is committed to his care, with wisdom. Men must not be put to the blush, they must not suffer by their friends' disingenuity; unfaithfulness is the very worst thing that can happen in friendship; and, next to that, weakness and imprudence, which, though they do not speak so bad a mind, yet may be the cause of as great mischief, and make it impossible for friendship to subsist. 6. Again, it is necessary to the character of a friend that he should be of a constant temper, directed by reason, and acting unchangeably according to its direction. A true friend is always the same; that is, his sentiments and conduct never change but when there is reason for it. 7. But there is one particular in which the firmness of a friendly mind is as much tried as in any other, and that is in resisting any solicitation to do a thing that may be in itself bad or indiscreet, or hurtful to him that desires it. What is right and fit must always be our rule, and we ought to observe it inviolably, not only because the obligation to this is superior to all the obligations of friendship, but also from principles of kindness and benevolence. Next to the firmness that ought to be maintained in denying what is hurtful, there ought to be a resolution in animadverting upon faults. This is the most friendly and useful office imaginable, and an office to which an affectionate mind does with difficulty bring itself. To admonish and rebuke is to put one to great pain, and whatever gives pain to a friend is gone about with reluctance and aversion: yet there is no true faithfulness when this is not done; and it is one of the noblest ends of friendship. Nor can anything give more satisfaction to an ingenuous mind than to be thus intimately related to one who, he knows, will use faithful freedom with him, and prudently animadvert upon all his weaknesses. But though strict virtue is necessary as the foundation of true friendship, and great freedom ought to be used in animadverting upon faults, yet intimate friendship does not bear any rigid severity, any haughty stiffness of manners. It expects sweetness, and gentleness, and condescendency, so far as innocence and virtue will allow. 8. Again, friendship abhors all jealousy—a disposition to be suspicious, where there is no just cause given. The temper of one that is fit to be a friend is frank and open; conscious of no ungenerous cunning in itself, it does not suspect it in others. And if any circumstance appears less favourable than one would desire, yet it puts the most candid interpretation upon it that may be; and will not entertain a bad opinion of a friend, nor break with

him, without manifest proof of his doing what renders him unworthy that relation.

9. Lastly, there can be no fast friendship where there is not a disposition to bear with unavoidable infirmities and to forgive faults. There may be infirmities and culpable defects in characters which in general are good and worthy, and very capable of intimate and fast friendship; yet this cannot be without that generosity which overlooks little infirmities, and can fix upon excellent and amiable qualities (though blended with the others) as the objects of its esteem and friendship. This generosity we ought by all means to cultivate in ourselves, considering how much we need it in others, and how much we expect it. Seeing, then, that so many shining qualities are necessary to make a perfect friend, they must be very few who are perfectly qualified for that relation, and men should be very cautious in their choice—careful not to run into intimacies all of a sudden, intimacies fit to be used only in the highest friendship; not to run into them, I say, with persons who are not capable of friendship at all. As there cannot be too great caution in choosing an intimate friend, so there cannot be too great firmness in cleaving to him when well chosen. Providence gives nothing in mortal life more valuable than such a friend, and happy they who enjoy this blessing! But, to conclude the whole, let it be ever remembered that true friendship, this glorious union of spirits, is founded in virtue; in virtue, I say, in that only. It is this that begets a likeness in the most important dispositions, sentiments, business, and designs of life; it is this in which the attracting and cementing power consists, which we admire for its own sake, and love for itself; it is this only that will make friendships firm, and constant, and reputable; it is this only that will make present friendship truly gainful, and the remembrance of past intimacies pleasing. And as virtue must lie at the foundation of friendship, so all friendship ought to be considered and improved as a means of confirming and exalting our virtue. (*Jas. Duchal, D.D.*)

Friendship.—I. THERE IS SUCH A THING AS FRIENDSHIP AND HUMAN AFFECTION. 1. God has implanted in our nature a social principle. 2. There are certain qualifications, distinctions, and relations that give scope to this principle. 3. There have been surprising instances of friendship among mankind. II. THE WISDOM AND GOODNESS OF PROVIDENCE IN THUS ORDERING THINGS. 1. It keeps society together. 2. The pleasures that attend its exercise. 3. It makes us in a humble degree like God. 4. It is suited to our state both in this world and another. III. THIS FRIENDSHIP IS IMPERFECT. 1. Peculiarities of natural temper. 2. Clashing of interests. 3. Incapacity to help. 4. Want of religion. 5. Distance. 6. Short duration. Conclusion: 1. What reason to admire the Divine wisdom and goodness! 2. It is a duty we owe to our Maker and our fellow-creatures to cultivate this. 3. Let us not depend on human friendship. (*T. N. Toller.*)

Making friends a gift.—When Abraham Lincoln was a young man starting in life, it used to be said of him, "Lincoln has nothing—only plenty of friends." To have plenty of friends is to be very rich—if they are the right sort. Those are indeed blessed who have received from God this gift of making friends—a gift which involves many things, but, above all, the power of going out of one's self and seeing and appreciating whatever is noble and loving in another. **There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.**—*The faithful Friend*.—The two most eminent philosophers of pagan antiquity saw in friendship little more than a calculation of benefits which it might be supposed to confer, and scarcely recognised at all the possibility of its possessing a disinterested character. Plutarch affirmed that in his time friendship did not exist any longer even in families; that it had once existed in the heroic ages, but was now confined to the stage. The moral condition of a nation must have become corrupt below the point of recovery, when so Godlike a relation as that of friendship can be so discountenanced, depreciated, and suspected. It is not Christianity which has created friendship, but Christianity has lifted it up and transfigured it. Even in our common life we meet with friends who are better to us than even our relations; but certainly the text does emphatically describe the character of One who is pre-eminently the Friend of man, the Friend of sinners, and the Friend of saints. The history of brothers, as exemplified in the Scriptures, is somewhat disheartening. (Illustrate by Cain and Abel; Jacob and Esau; and Joseph's brethren.) Still, few things are more common than implacable feuds between brethren. There are jealousies of brotherhood. I. THE LOVE OF OUR BEST FRIEND IS DISINTERESTED. All love, according to some, is a thing of interest. But there certainly is friendship which loves, not for what one can get out of the other, but which loves the other for his own sake. There are friends who live in each other. And surely we may say that

the love of Jesus is a disinterested one. He left the world in which He is, and was, God over all, not to seek His own happiness, but ours. His friendship for us would have been noble and disinterested had His mission involved in it no humiliation and no suffering. Whatever God does for man must be spontaneous and disinterested, springing from a will which nothing can coerce, and from a benevolence which finds its highest joy in the holiness and happiness of those whom it seeks to bless. The recompense which Christ sought was not His own exaltation, but the joy of seeing others rescued, redeemed, purified, glorified.

II. IT IS AN INTELLIGENT FRIENDSHIP. It is based on knowledge, a complete knowledge of us. The foundation of many friendships is not the rock of knowledge, but the sand of ignorance. They are the creations of a mere impulse, the result of a casual meeting in circumstances which revealed neither friend in his real character. But Christ does not throw around us a glamour of fancy in which we seem better than we are. He knows what is in man. He knows the worst of us. It is a friendship in which there is every conceivable disparity, and yet He sticketh closer than a brother.

III. THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST IS MARKED BY ITS FIDELITY. And what is a friendship worth that does not possess this property? If friendship has its pleasures, it has also its obligations, which must be fulfilled if friendship is not to degenerate into a soft and contemptible acquaintanceship without nobleness or true advantage. The only bond of certain friends seems to be one of mutual flattery. To love one's friend means far more than to love his comfort and self-complaisance. To tell men of their faults is the luxury of enemies but the duty of friends. Now, the friendship of Christ is one which never neglects this essential duty. Many of the deepest and most sorrowful mysteries of your life may some day be explained by a single word—the faithfulness of Christ.

IV. HIS FRIENDSHIP IS MARKED BY ITS CONSTANCY. Few friendships have sufficient vitality in them to extend from youth to old age. Many friendships are but summer friendships. The friendship of Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He does not break off from us because we are not all we should be to Him. There is a limit to all our earthly friendships, a limit to their power, a limit to their help. If we need friendship on this side of the grave, how much more shall we need it on the other side. So we say, "Seek not friends that die, or whom you must leave, but seek for One who never dies, and whom you can never leave." (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*)

Christ closer than a brother:—Christ has shown His friendship towards us—1. In His incarnation, and in His death for us. He is a brother born for adversity, the adversity that comes through sin. 2. By tendering to us the means of grace. 3. By protecting us and providing for us so long. He is "a very present help in our time of trouble." In temptation He has opened a way of escape, and in affliction He has sent a Divine Comforter. (*J. W. Reeve, M.A.*)

Christ our Friend:—The following excellent qualities of Christ, as a Friend, may serve to recommend and endear Him to our hearts: 1. He is an ancient Friend. Who can declare the antiquity of this friendship? Is it ancient as the incarnation? Is it ancient as His baptism? Is it ancient as the prophetic or patriarchal age? Nay, it is older than time itself. It is from everlasting. 2. He is a careful Friend. It was the psalmist's complaint, "No man careth for my soul." But the Christian has a Friend who cares for him. 3. He is a prudent Friend. Our best earthly friends may err through ignorance or mistake; but this Friend "abounds in all wisdom and prudence." 4. He is a faithful Friend. Friends frequently prove false, and sad indeed it is when they prove like a brook in summer. Some men are not to be trusted. Those in whom you confide most will be ready to betray you soonest. But Christ is faithful in all His promises. 5. He is a loving Friend. Friendship without love is like religion without love; a friendless and inconsistent—a cold, unmeaning, and impossible thing. Christ's love is said to surpass the love of women. 6. He is a constant and unchangeable Friend. His compassions fail not. Our Friend is a Friend for ever. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." "Having loved His own, He loveth them to the end." If Christ is our Friend, we may rest satisfied. All things will work together for our good. (*D. McIndoe.*)

Jesus, the true Friend:—I. REASONS WHY IT IS MOST DESIRABLE THAT THE YOUNG SHOULD SECURE THE FRIENDSHIP OF JESUS.—1. His great knowledge about us and all future events makes His friendship most desirable. 2. His extraordinary power. 3. His vast undying love. I do not care for that friendship which is based upon selfishness, or which tries to secure mere personal ends. The love of Jesus is the root, the foundation, of His friendship. Love is the most sacrificing principle in the world. No one ever yet saw all the spirit of sacrifice

there was in the love of Christ, and how He ever sought our good, our pardon, our happiness, our heaven, our glory. Love is not only the sweetest and most lovely power, but also the strongest in the universe. 4. His truth to His engagements. 5. Sad consequences must arise if the friendship of Jesus be not secured. II. HOW SHOULD WE ACT IN REFERENCE TO SUCH A FRIEND? 1. We must do what will please Him. The little word "do" must be written in good, fair characters in our hearts, in our efforts, and in our lives. 2. We must on all suitable occasions acknowledge His friendship. 3. We must go direct to this Friend in all our troubles, as well as with all our joys. 4. We must faithfully look after His interests. Solomon says that this Friend "sticketh closer than a brother"; and they are the wisest who resolve to stick the most closely to Jesus, through sunshine and through shower, through life and through death. (*J. Goodacre.*) *A faithful Friend* :—Cicero has well said, "Friendship is the only thing in the world concerning the usefulness of which all mankind are agreed." He who would be happy here must have friends. Yet friendship has been the cause of the greatest misery to men when it has been unworthy and unfaithful. I. CHRIST IS A FRIEND THAT STICKETH CLOSER THAN A BROTHER. II. THE REASONS WHY WE MAY DEPEND UPON CHRIST AS BEING A FAITHFUL FRIEND. 1. True friendship can only be made between true men, whose hearts are the soul of honour. 2. Faithfulness to us in our faults is a certain sign of fidelity in a friend. 3. There are some things in His friendship which render us sure of not being deceived when we put our confidence in Him. 4. The friendship that will last does not take its rise in the chambers of mirth, nor is it fed and fattened there. 5. A friend acquired by folly is never a faithful friend. 6. Friendship and love, to be real, must not lie in words, but in deeds. 7. A purchased friend will never last long. III. AN INFERENCE TO BE DERIVED FROM THIS. Lavater says, "The qualities of your friends will be those of your enemies; cold friends, cold enemies; half friends, half enemies; fervid enemies, warm friends." Then we infer that, if Christ sticks close, and is our Friend, then our enemies will stick close, and never leave us till we die. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The friendship of Christ* :—I. THE VALUE OF THE FRIENDSHIP OF CHRIST. 1. He is a Friend to His people, and does for them more than what the strongest earthly friendship can dictate. (1) To a kind and constant friend we can freely unfold the secrets of our heart, and look for counsel and direction in every perplexing circumstance. With far greater freedom may the humble Christian apply for direction to the wonderful Counsellor and Prince of Peace. (2) From a kind and generous friend we expect compassion in our troubles and sympathy in our affliction. The merciful High Priest, and the Friend of His people, is touched with a feeling of their infirmities. (3) From a constant and kind friend we expect protection when injured and in danger. This also the gracious Friend of sinners willingly imparts to all who, in the exercise of faith, humility, and trust, betake themselves to Him. (4) From firm, constant, and generous friends, we receive such supplies of good things as they can bestow, when we stand in need of them. But what are all the bounties of the creature when compared with the bounty and benevolence of our gracious Lord? 2. His Divine friendship is free from those imperfections which lessen the comfort of human intimacy and attachment. (1) A friend and a brother may withdraw their regard, and prove inconstant. Some real or imaginary offence, some impropriety of conduct, the injurious misrepresentations of the malicious, or some scheme of self-interest, may make those whom we have loved and esteemed avert their countenances from us, withdraw their intercourse, and prove false in their friendship; but this Beloved of the soul continues steadfast in His love—"the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." (2) The best of friends or brothers on earth may not be able to administer that Divine assistance or support which circumstances may require; they may be ignorant what course should be taken; they may be oppressed with poverty, or laid on beds of languishing, or borne down with a succession of griefs. But the compassionate Redeemer is a brother born for adversity. (3) The best of friends and brothers may be called to stations of work and usefulness in places of the world to which we can have but little access, so that, after years of happy intimacy, distance of place may interrupt the sweetest friendship and all the joys of mutual intercourse. But it is not thus with that best Friend whom the text extols. Wherever His people are, He is there to bless them, and to do them good. (4) Death dissolves the sweetest friendships. But Jesus, our Redeemer and Friend, is immortal and unchangeable. II. I AM TO RECOMMEND THE SAVIOUR TO YOUR ATTENTION, ADMIRATION, AND ACCEPTANCE. 1. The personal

excellences He inherits. 2. The unspeakable blessings He bestows. III. Let us now direct you to the IMPROVEMENT of what has been said. 1. This subject suggests important directions to believers in Jesus. (1) He that has friends must show himself friendly. Beware of whatever may offend your heavenly Friend, or cause Him to withdraw the manifestations of His presence. (2) Testify the sincerity and ardour of your friendship, by regard for those who are the friends of Christ. (3) Testify your friendship to the Saviour, by warm concern for His interests in the world. (4) Maintain daily and delightful fellowship with your heavenly Friend, that thus you may cultivate the sense of His friendship, and may guard against all distance, coldness, and reserve. (5) Ye friends of the heavenly Bridegroom long for the coming of your Lord, and for the full enjoyment of His immediate presence in heaven. 2. I shall now conclude with addressing men in different situations. (1) This Friend demands the affection of the young by motives the most engaging and tender. (2) Are you afflicted? Be entreated to seek your support and consolation in the friendship of Christ. (3) Are you indifferent and careless about religion, but pursuing the enjoyments of sense with the whole bent of a corrupted mind? Yield to the entreaties of a dying Saviour; fly to Him; make the Judge your friend, and know for your comfort, that in receiving Christ Jesus the Lord, you become through faith in Him the children of God, and are made joint heirs with Christ, that best of friends, who sticketh closer than a brother. (*A. Bonar.*) *Friendship* (a sermon to children):—I. HOW ARE WE TO HOLD OUR FRIENDS? Friendliness preserves friendship. But what is friendliness? 1. A friendly man is a sincere man. True, trustworthy, transparent in character. Mocking and deceitful men, like Mr. Facing-both-Ways, are never loved and trusted. By their duplicity and insincerity the Stuarts lost a kingdom, and King George I., who succeeded them, and prospered and won the affection of the great English people, was once heard to say, "My maxim is, never to abandon my friends, to do justice to all, and to fear no man." 2. A friendly man is frank and generous. A story is told of Demetrius, one of the conquerors of Athens, that shows the power of generosity in making friends. After the glorious victory Demetrius did not harass and humiliate the inhabitants of the beautiful city, but treated them generously. Commanding his soldiers to fill the empty houses of the citizens with provisions, they wondered at his goodness, and fear grew into love. II. WHO IS THE NOBLEST FRIEND?—"There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother." What a faithful friend was Jonathan to David! 1. In Jesus we have a royal Friend, possessing treasures, and crowns, and kingdoms such as no earthly monarch owns. 2. In Jesus we have a generous Friend. 3. Jesus is a constant Friend. Some people use their friends as shipwrecked sailors use their rafts, as masons use scaffolding, as gardeners use clay in grafting trees. They neglect them or fling them away whenever they have served their selfish purposes. But Jesus is a steady Friend, "Ever faithful, ever true." He will never leave us nor forsake us. After bidding farewell to all his relations, President Edwards, when dying, said, "Now, where is Jesus of Nazareth, my true and never-failing Friend?" And immediately the "Friend born for adversity" came and led him through the valley of the shadow, and gave him a place among "the shining ones" in our heavenly Father's home. (*J. Moffat Scott.*) *An invisible Friend*:—Not able to conceive of an invisible Friend! Oh, it is not when your children are with you, it is not when you see and hear them, that they are most to you; it is when the sad assembly is gone; it is when the daisies have resumed their growing again in the place where the little form was laid; it is when you have carried your children out, and said farewell, and come home again, and day and night are full of sweet memories; it is when summer and winter are full of touches and suggestions of them; it is when you cannot look up towards God without thinking of them, nor look down toward yourself and not think of them; it is when they have gone out of your arms, and are living to you only by the power of the imagination, that they are the most to you. The invisible children are the realest children, the sweetest children, the truest children, the children that touch our hearts as no hands of flesh ever could touch them. And do you tell me that we cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus Christ because He is invisible? (*H. W. Beecher.*) *Christ a personal Friend*:—What made so great a difference? Of two friends of Alexander the Great, the historian Plutarch calls one Philo-Basileus, that is, the friend of the King, and the other, Philo-Alexandros, that is, the friend of Alexander. Similarly, some one has said St. Peter was Philo-Christos, the friend of the Christ, but St. John was Philo-Jesus, the friend of Jesus. This touches the quick: Peter was attached to the person who filled the

office of Messiah, John to the Person Himself. And this is a distinction which marks different types of Christian piety in all ages. The Christ of some is more official—the Head of the Church, the Founder of Christianity, and the like—that of others is more personal; but it is the personal bond which holds the heart. The most profoundly Christian spirits have loved the Saviour, not for His benefits, but for Himself alone. (*J. Stalker*.)

CHAPTER XIX.

VER. 2. Also that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.—*The advantages of knowledge to the lower classes*:—I. THE UTILITY OF KNOWLEDGE IN GENERAL. The extent to which we have the faculty of acquiring knowledge forms the most obvious distinction of our species. As the power of acquiring knowledge is to be ascribed to reason, so the attainment of it mightily strengthens and improves it, and thereby enables it to enrich itself with further acquisitions. Knowledge, in general, expands the mind, exalts the faculties, refines the taste of pleasure, and opens numerous sources of intellectual enjoyment. The moral good of the acquisition of knowledge is chiefly this, that by multiplying the mental resources it has a tendency to exalt the character, and, in some measure, to correct and subdue the taste for gross sensuality. Some think that the instruction of the lower classes will make them dissatisfied with their station in life; and by impairing the habits of subordination, endanger the tranquillity of the state. But, in truth, nothing renders legitimate governments so insecure as extreme ignorance in the people. The true prop of good government is the opinion, the perception, on the part of the subject, of benefits resulting from it. Nothing can produce or maintain that opinion but knowledge. Of tyrannical and unlawful governments, indeed, the support is fear, to which ignorance is as congenial as it is abhorrent from the genius of a free people. Ignorance gives a sort of eternity to prejudice, and perpetuity to error. II. THE UTILITY OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE IN PARTICULAR. Religion, on account of its intimate relation to a future state, is every man's proper business, and should be his chief care. The primary truths of religion are of such daily use and necessity, that they form, not the materials of mental luxury, so properly as the food of the mind. Two considerations may suffice to evince the indispensable necessity of Scriptural knowledge. 1. The Scriptures contain an authentic discovery of the way of salvation. 2. Scriptural knowledge is of inestimable value on account of its supplying an infallible rule of life. Of an accountable creature, duty is the concern of every moment, since he is every moment pleasing or displeasing God. Hence the indispensable necessity, to every description of persons, of sound religious instruction, and of an intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures as its genuine source. (*R. Hall, M.A.*) *Evils of popular ignorance*:—I. THE EVILS OF IGNORANCE. The faculties of reason, and judgment, and moral determination, must ever distinguish man from "the beast that perisheth," must for ever constitute the true dignity of human nature; but then faculties and powers are of little value in themselves, and if they be not cultivated and developed, and directed to some specific end. Instruction is to man what culture is to plants. When he is deprived of its aid, his powers will either lie wholly dormant, or that which they bring forth, like the productions of the uncultivated plant, will be wild and worthless. Ignorance "is not good" for man, in regard of his social advancement. To the improvement of the mind all nations owe whatever of social blessing they enjoy. The comforts and conveniences of life, the useful and productive arts, the blessings of law and order and good government, are all derived to us from an elevated condition of the national intelligence. Ignorance may be considered as negative of everything that is good and useful: it is the night of a nation's life, during which it can neither work for itself nor for others. Of all despotisms, the despotism of ignorance is the most tyrannical; its will is the only law it recognises, and it hates the light of reason as the night-bird dreads the sun. Ignorance "is not good" for the cause of national morality and virtue. Virtue can no more exist without a certain amount of knowledge than an animal can exist without life. In proportion as ignorance prevails morality will be destroyed. Ignorance "is not good" for a man's individual happiness. Ignorance is a state

in which all the finer feelings of the human soul are locked up, and the subject of it is deprived of some of the purest forms of moral happiness and enjoyment. Right knowledge tends to promote a man's happiness, even with regard to the present state. Such knowledge will be found to have an ulterior effect upon a man's character; it will awaken within him many pure and elevating emotions.

II. THE NATURE AND OBJECTS OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE. It may be questioned whether the term education is understood in the plain, broad, comprehensive sense in which Hooker defined it, by whom it was made to comprehend the cultivation of all the moral, spiritual, immortal powers of man. The knowledge that "it is not good" for the soul to be without, includes a knowledge of Holy Scripture. Through this knowledge we get knowledge of other things—ourselves, redemption, sanctification. Without this knowledge a man cannot be moral, cannot be happy, cannot have peace in this life, cannot have hope for the life to come. "It is not good" that a man should be without knowing what are those remedial agencies which have been provided of God for lifting up his soul from its condition of degradation, and preparing it for endless happiness in the presence of his God. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*)

The importance of knowledge :—Man alone of all the creatures in this lower world is possessed of a rational, intelligent, and immortal soul. Whilst other creatures are made to look down upon the ground, man stands erect, with his lofty countenance looking up to the heavens. He can look abroad on the face of the earth, and understand, in some degree, and admire the wisdom and power and goodness manifested in the works of the great Creator. He has analysed the elements of air and water, and can even make them of their component gases. He can explore the trackless ocean, ride in safety on its swelling billows, and cut his liquid way to the most distant regions of the world. Man can acquire a knowledge of foreign languages, and thus converse with men of other climes and kindreds and tongues. Moreover, by means of written or printed characters, he can spread his thoughts around him yet wider and wider, and even after he has sunk into the grave he can thus mould the minds of generations to come. If, then, the mind of man be capable of such great things, and can exert such a mighty influence, we should take good care that, by affording it Christian knowledge and a religious training, it be rightly informed and properly directed. Thus science and devotion would walk hand in hand together, and lead on our youthful progeny to the knowledge of the true God, and of the duties which they owe to Him and to one another. "That the soul be without knowledge, it is not good," is manifest from the consideration that without the knowledge of some useful art or science or business, man, ordinarily speaking, cannot procure the means of support, or fulfil the duties of his station in life. Moreover, that it is not good for the soul to be without knowledge may be inferred from the consideration that the faculties of the mind, on the one hand, are suited to the reception and pursuit of knowledge, and are strengthened and improved when they are so employed; whilst, on the other hand, the whole economy of nature is such as to invite us to examine and admire it. But doubtless the knowledge spoken of in the text relates principally to Divine things. What is the light of science apart from the light of Christ? Now, that the soul be without this knowledge, it is not good—I. WITH REGARD TO THE INDIVIDUAL HIMSELF. 1. It is not good, because such a state is unhappy and unprofitable. "He that is wise may be profitable unto himself." But how unprofitable is the state of a child growing up without the knowledge of what is necessary to his welfare both in time and through eternity! 2. Such a state is not good, because it is not a safe one. In what an awfully insecure state is the soul that is without the knowledge of God! Any moment the thread of life may be cut asunder, and then shall his desire and expectation perish! II. IN REGARD TO OTHERS. 1. In regard to God and His work. It is true that "our goodness extendeth not to Him." Our knowledge cannot augment His infinite stores of knowledge. Neither does He need our services. They cannot profit Him, nor add to His perfection and blessedness. But still, in a lower sense, God may be said to need the instruments or agents which He is pleased to make use of in accomplishing His designs. It is manifest that without the knowledge of which I am speaking we cannot be fit instruments in the hands of God for performing His work, for establishing and extending His kingdom through the world. 2. It is not good in regard to our fellow-men. How should he who is without knowledge fulfil the relative and social duties of life, giving to each his due, and benefiting all within his sphere of action? (*T. H. Terry, B.A.*) *Ignorance is not good* :—I. MAN IS POSSESSED OF AN IMMORTAL PRINCIPLE WHICH, ONCE

CALLED INTO EXISTENCE, IS BY ITS VERY CONSTITUTION COEVAL WITH ITS MAKER. Man has a soul. God has provided for the supply of the soul as well as of the body. The mental aliment is knowledge. II. PROVE IN WHAT RESPECT IT IS NOT GOOD THAT THE SOUL BE WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE. The knowledge meant is—1. The knowledge of God as revealed in His Word. 2. A knowledge of Christ crucified. 3. The knowledge of ourselves as fallen moral beings. 4. The knowledge of our threefold duty to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves. (1) It is not good for a man's self, whether we consider him as a solitary or a social being. (2) It is not good for others. Man, as even heathen moralists maintain, was made for his fellow-creatures as well as for himself. As causes produce effects, so ignorance produces rudeness, incivility, insubordination, and, too frequently, cunning, dishonesty, cruelty, sensuality, and every evil work. It cannot be good for others that they should be left without knowledge. (*J. W. Niblock, D.D.*) *The benefit of religious knowledge*:—There are things which we can and things which we cannot know. God hath set a limit to man's capacity of knowing, as to his faculty of hearing and seeing. There are things hid altogether from mortal ken. Still are there unhallowed longings after the fruit of the tree of knowledge. All that we may know let us set ourselves with energy to acquire. The benefits of knowledge may be traced in the progress of civilisation. It is knowledge which makes the difference between the refined Chinaman and the brutalised Kaffir. 1. If the soul be left without knowledge, it will be unable to detect the false maxims of the world, and of course to avoid the consequences to which they lead. 2. It is not good that the soul be without knowledge, lest we should be contaminated with the noxious errors on religious subjects which prevail so extensively amongst us in the present day. 3. Let the Christian remember that he must not be content with his present attainments. (*Albert Bibby, M.A.*) *The soul without knowledge*:—Other translations of this verse are, "It is not good for the soul to be without caution, for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth"; or "Quickness of action, without prudence of spirit, is not good, for he that hasteth with his feet sinneth"; or "Fervent zeal without prudence is not good," &c.; or "Ignorance of one's self is not good," &c. There does not appear the least necessity for any alteration of the received version. I. THAT IGNORANCE IS NOT GOOD FOR THE SOUL. "The soul without knowledge is not good." This will appear if we consider three things. 1. That an ignorant soul is exceedingly confined. The mind cannot range beyond what it knows. The more limited its information, the narrower is the scene of its activities. The man of enlarged scientific information has a range over vast continents, whereas the ignorant man is confined within the cell of his senses. Our souls get scope by exploring the unknown. "Knowledge," says Shakespeare, "is the wing on which we fly to heaven." 2. That an ignorant soul is exceedingly benighted. The contracted sphere in which it lives is only lighted with the rush-light of a few crude thoughts. Knowledge is light. The accession of every true idea is a planting of a new star in the mental heavens. The more knowledge, the brighter will sparkle the sky of your being. 3. That an ignorant soul is exceedingly feeble. Exercise and food are as essential to the power of the mind as they are to the power of the body. Knowledge is at once the incentive to exercise it and the aliment to strengthen. "Ignorance," says Johnson, "is mere privation by which nothing can be produced; it is a vacuity in which the soul sits motionless and torpid for want of attraction. And, without knowing why, we always rejoice when we learn, and grieve when we forget." Truly the soul without knowledge is not good. Of what good are limbs without the power of exercise; what good are eyes without light? II. IGNORANCE IS PERILOUS TO THE SOUL. Ignorance is more than a negative evil, it is a positive curse. The text teaches that ignorance—1. Exposes to sinful haste. "He that hasteth with his feet sinneth." Men without knowledge are ever in danger of acting incautiously, acting with a reckless haste. As a rule the more ignorant a man is the more hasty he is in his conclusions and steps of conduct. The less informed the mind is the more rapid and reckless in its generalisation. Impulse, not intelligence, is the helmsman of the ignorant soul. 2. It exposes to a perversity of conduct. The foolishness of man perverteth his way. What is foolishness but ignorance? Ignorant men are terribly liable to perversity of conduct in every relation of life, and especially in relation to the great God. The murderers of Christ were ignorant. Paul says, had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 3. It exposes to impiety of feeling. Ignorant men are ever disposed to find fault with God. Ignorance is peevish. It is always fretting. Learn that a nation of ignorant souls is not only

a nation of worthless men, but a nation liable to the commission of terrible mistakes and crimes. Men should get knowledge for the sake of becoming useful. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The evil of ignorance*:—I. A CASE SUPPOSED. "A soul without knowledge." This is not to be understood absolutely. All knowledge is not blessing, nor all ignorance misfortune. The knowledge specified in the text may imply—1. A knowledge of the works of God in creation. God is known by His works. Their vast magnitude serves to display His power. Their amazing extent shadows forth His immensity. The admirable harmony that prevails among them evidences His wisdom. And the ample provision made for all creatures exhibits His goodness. 2. A knowledge of our particular calling, trade, or profession. No man is obliged to know everything, but every man ought to know what he professes to know. 3. A knowledge of the will of God, as revealed in the Bible. This revelation is so plain that he may run that readeth it; so ample as to embrace the whole of our duty; so repeated that we have precept upon precept; so circumstantial as to mark every description of character, and identify every variety of situation; so impartial as to know no distinction between the monarch and the beggar; and so full and perfect that nothing can be added to it. Our knowledge of the will of God should be Scriptural, spiritual, experimental, and practical. II. AN AFFIRMATION MADE CONCERNING IT. "It is not good." 1. It is not good, as it does not harmonise with the original purpose of God in the formation of man. 2. It is not good, as it is not commendable. 3. As it is not beneficial. 4. As it is not comfortable. 5. As it is not safe. From this subject let us learn—(1) What gratitude is due to God, who hath afforded us such facilities for the acquisition of knowledge. (2) How diligently we should use the means with which God hath favoured us for augmenting our stock of knowledge. (3) Let us commiserate the circumstances of those who are destitute of the means of information. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *The evil tendency of education not based on religion*:—What is meant by knowledge? An acquaintance with those truths the perception and practice of which will duly qualify us both for our present and future state of existence. To this end we should know ourselves, our capacities, our duties, our particular business or vocation in life; the state of things in which we are placed, the character of mankind in general, and the nature of our social and civil relations. We should know also the revealed character of God; the position in which we stand to Him, the nature of His transactions with the human race, our present condition and future destiny. The matter and extent of knowledge is almost infinite. Exhibiting, as the mind does, a most varied scale of intellectual strength, a corresponding variety in the measure of knowledge is the necessary consequence. Considerations for confirming and illustrating the truth that for the soul to be without knowledge is not good: 1. The human mind is evidently framed for the acquisition of knowledge. 2. A certain degree of knowledge is absolutely necessary to enable men duly to perform their parts in life. 3. Knowledge tends to increase the influence and usefulness of its possessor. 4. It tends to increase the pleasures of life, by opening new sources of innocent enjoyment. If we would give men an education suitable to their character and destinies, we must attend to the cultivation of the heart as well as that of the head. We must make religion a prominent feature in our systems of instruction. Without religion, worldly knowledge, by stimulating the pride and pravity of a corrupt heart, may do much injury. When the foundation of morality and religion is firmly laid, we may proceed with safety to erect the superstructure of human science and general knowledge. But while education may teach men their duty, it cannot enable them to perform it. Religion alone can do that. He who would establish a system of education without making religion the basis of it, is like a man who builds his house upon the sand. He will find the corruptions of human nature too strong for his intellectual barrier. There is no more effectual method of checking the progress of socialism and infidelity than a system of sound, solid, and religious education. Then educate the rising generation, but do so in a sound and Scriptural manner. (*E. B. Were, M.A.*) *Knowledge essential to man's welfare*:—In what senses does the writer affirm the text? 1. In the personal sense. To man as an individual. Knowledge gives him mental occupation. 2. In a domestic sense. The family circle, or household, is the first and simplest form of society. It is necessary to its well-being that a legitimate authority and a due subordination should exist in it. The duties of a parent cannot be performed without the advantages of knowledge. 3. In a social sense. In reference to the proper discharge of our duties towards friends and neighbours, superiors and inferiors. 4. In a political sense. If we

desire to make a man a good member of the state, we must instruct him in the principles on which political society is formed, and by which alone can exist. We must teach him the grounds of moral obligation. And what are those grounds but the truths of religion? (*Geo. Gibbon, M.A.*)

Ver. 3. **The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the Lord.**—*The folly and sin of men in perverting their own way, and then fretting against God* :—Men are apt to charge all the afflictions which befall them upon God, whereas they bring most of them upon themselves. God is no further accessory to them than as, in the nature of things, and in the course of His wise providence, He hath established a connection between folly and suffering, between sin and misery. Homer observes that “men lay those evils upon the gods which they have incurred through their own folly and perverseness.” “The foolishness of man” signifies his want of thought and reflection; his indiscretion and rashness. It “perverts his way” leads him aside from the path of wisdom and prudence, safety and happiness; by this means he brings himself into trouble, is reduced to necessity, perplexed with difficulties, or oppressed with sorrow. Then he committeth this grand error after all the rest, that “his heart fretteth against the Lord.” He is vexed, not at himself, but at Providence. “Fretteth” expresses the commotion and uneasiness there is in a discontented, ungoverned mind.

I. **THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE ON WHICH MEN ACT IN THIS CASE IS RIGHT AND JUST.** When they fret against the Lord they suppose that there is a God, and that He observes and interests Himself in the affairs of His creatures; and that it is a considerable part of His providential government to try, exercise, and promote the virtues of His rational creatures by the discipline of affliction.

II. **THE CONCLUSION THEY DRAW IS GENERALLY WRONG, AND THEIR CHARGE UPON THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD GROUNDLESS AND UNJUST.** 1. It is often the case with regard to men's health. Many complain that God denies them the health and spirits which He has given to others. But health very largely, and very directly, depends on men's management of themselves, by indulgence, fretfulness, inactivity, too close application to business, &c. 2. With regard to their circumstances in life. We see men impoverished and reduced to straits and difficulties. They complain that God brings them into straits, and embarrasses their circumstances. But most persons are really in straits through their own negligence, carelessness, or extravagance. Many are ruined in this world by an indolent temper. Cardinal de Retz used to say that “misfortune was only another word for imprudence.” 3. With regard to their relations in life. How many unhappy marriages there are! But they are almost always the consequence of foolish and wilful choices. Many complain that their children are idle, disobedient, and undutiful. But this is generally the result of parental inefficiency in training or in example. 4. With regard to men's minds and their religious concerns. Many who make a profession of religion are uneasy and fretful, without any external cause; but this is usually owing to their own negligence or self-willedness. III. **THE FOLLY AND WICKEDNESS OF SUCH CONDUCT.** It is very absurd, for in most of these cases they have no one to blame but themselves. It likewise proceeds from ignorance of themselves. Fretfulness only tends to aggravate our afflictions and to hurt our minds. It may provoke God to bring upon us some heavier affliction. Application: 1. How much prudence, caution, and foresight are necessary for those who are setting out in life! 2. What a great and mischievous evil pride is! 3. Inquire to what your afflictions are owing. 4. Guard against the great sin of fretting against the Lord. (*J. Orton.*) *Man's sorrows the result of his sins* :—

I. **ILLUSTRATE THE PROVERB.** 1. As regards health. 2. As regards worldly substance. 3. As regards the vexations of domestic life. 4. From the state of the mind. 5. From the world in which we reside. II. **INSTRUCTIONS DERIVABLE FROM THE PROVERB.** 1. It instructs us with regard to sin. 2. It shows the inefficacy of mere suffering to bring a man to a proper state of thinking and feeling. 3. The disposition of the mind under sanctified affliction. 4. The reality of a moral providence. 5. Learn to look to God for His grace and guidance. (*W. Jay.*) *The misfortunes of men chargeable on themselves* :—I. **CONSIDER THE EXTERNAL CONDITION OF MAN.** He is placed in a world where he has by no means the disposal of the events that happen. Calamities befall us, which are directly the Divine dealing. But a multitude of evils beset us which are due to our own negligences or imprudences. Men seek to ascribe their disappointments to any cause rather than to their own misconduct, and when they can devise no other cause

they lay them to the charge of Providence. They are doubly unjust towards God. When we look abroad we see more proofs of the truth of this assertion. We see great societies of men torn in pieces by intestine dissensions, tumults, and civil commotions. But did man control his passions, and form his conduct according to the dictates of wisdom, humanity, and virtue, the earth would no longer be desolated by wars and cruelties. II. CONSIDER THE INTERNAL STATE OF MAN. So far as this inward disquietude arises from the stings of conscience and the horrors of guilt, there can be no doubt of its being self-created misery, which it is impossible to impute to Heaven. But how much poison man himself infuses into the most prosperous conditions by peevishness and restlessness, by impatience and low spirits, &c. Unattainable objects pursued, intemperate passions nourished, vicious pleasures and desires indulged, God and God's holy laws forgotten—these are the great scourges of the world; the great causes of the life of man being so embroiled and unhappy. 1. Let us be taught to look upon sin as the source of all our miseries. 2. The reality of a Divine government exercised over the world. 3. The injustice of our charging Providence with a promiscuous and unequal distribution of its favours among the good and the bad. 4. The necessity of looking up to God for direction and aid in the conduct of life. Let us hold fast the persuasion of these fundamental truths—that, in all His dispensations, God is just and good; that the cause of all the troubles we suffer is in ourselves, not in Him; that virtue is the surest guide to a happy life; and that he who forsakes this guide enters upon the path of death. (*H. Blair, D.D.*) *Fretting against God a frequent sin*:—Men are oftener guilty of this sin than they imagine. Our hearts fret against the Lord by fretting at the ministers and instruments of His providence; and therefore, when the people murmured against Moses in the wilderness, he tells them that their murmuring was not against him and his brother Aaron, but against the Lord. Instead of fretting, it is our duty to accept of the punishment of our iniquity, and to bless God that matters are not so bad with us as we deserve. If our troubles come upon us without any particular reason from our own conduct, yet reflections upon God would be very unjust. Job's troubles were extremely grievous, and as they came upon him without cause in himself, he was made to acknowledge his great folly in reflecting upon God for his distresses. (*G. Lawson, D.D.*) *The untoward incidents of life must not be charged against God*:—Let us not charge God overhastily with the untoward incidents of life. In the main we are the manufacturers of our own life-material. If you give the weaver none but dark threads he can only fashion a sombre pattern. (*J. Halsey.*) *Life regarded as a wrong*:—George Eliot once said to a friend, with deep solemnity, that she regarded it as a wrong and misery that she had ever been born. (*Oscar Browning.*)

Ver. 4. **Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour.**—*The rich and the poor*:—Nothing upon earth is so powerful as money. It is a force before which everything bows. Wealth is such a mighty power, that one possessing it does not feel his dependence as other men do. Being more easily spoiled than other men, his salvation is more difficult. This accounts for everything the gospel has to say about rich men. In speaking of wealth, we are very apt to make the mistake of supposing that only very rich men are wealthy. The Bible accounts that man wealthy who, free from debt, has anything left after making provision for actual necessities of life. Poverty is isolation. When we become poor we become lonely. Either friends withdraw from us or we withdraw from them. When one gets really poor he is pretty much left by his brethren. They may not mean to shun him, but they let him pretty severely alone. The poor are the material we Christians are to work upon. To these we are to let our light shine. It is our holiest work to stop this separation of the poor from his neighbours. The poor are here by Divine intention. The poor help to save our souls. We are not to relieve them only; we are to help them. Giving is not enough to fulfil our Christian duty towards them. Helping the poor to help themselves is the most Christlike thing you can do. Machinery in religious life is to be avoided. It is of use only as it helps to concentrate energy. (*G. R. Van de Water.*) *Poverty, riches, and social selfishness*:—I. THE TRIALS OF POVERTY. 1. Degradation. "The poor useth entreaties." To beg of a fellow-man is a degradation; it is that from which our manhood revolts. "The poor useth entreaties." They have to mortify the natural independence of their spirit. They are subjected to—2. Insolent treatment. "The rich answereth

roughly." 3. Social desertion. "The poor is separated from his neighbour." Who in this selfish world will make friends with the poor, however superior in intellect or excellent in character? When the wealthy man with his large circle of friends becomes poor the poles of his magnet are reversed, and his old friends feel the repulsion. II. THE TEMPTATIONS OF WEALTH. 1. Upon the mind of its possessor. It tends to promote haughtiness and insolence. "The rich answereth roughly." The temptation of wealth is revealed—2. Upon the mind of the wealthy man's circle. "Wealth maketh many friends." III. THE SELFISHNESS OF SOCIETY. "Every man is a friend to him that giveth gifts." (*Homilist.*) *Friendship of the world*:—When I see leaves drop from their trees in the beginning of autumn, just such, think I, is the friendship of the world; just such are the comforts and joys of this life. While the sap of maintenance lasts my friends will swarm in abundance, my joys and comforts will abide with me; but when the sap ceases, the spring which supplies them fails; in the winter of my need they leave me naked. (*H. G. Salter.*) *Friends sought for money*:—In Dr. Guthrie's "Autobiography" there is a good illustration of the unhappy state of cynicism into which the rich are prone to fall. There he relates how, in a winter of extraordinary severity, he made an appeal to a lady who had succeeded to a prodigious fortune, on behalf of the starving poor of his parish. In doing so he had no very sanguine hope of success. On being ushered into her room, she turned round, and showing her thin, spare figure, and a face that looked as if it had been cut out of mahogany, grinned and said, "I am sorry to see ye. What do you want? I suppose you are here seeking siller." "The very thing I am here for," was the Doctor's frank reply. Her next remark demonstrated how little power her riches had of conferring happiness; and with all her wealth of flatterers, what a poor, lonely, desolate, miserable creature this possessor of more than a million sterling was. "Ah," she said, "there is nobody comes to see me or seek me; but it's the money, the money they are after." We are glad to be able to relate that this rich old lady gave to Dr. Guthrie fifty pounds for the poor—an act which we hope shed a gleam of sunshine into her dark life.

Ver. 5. A false witness shall not be unpunished.—*The woe of the untruthful*:—The man who gives wrong evidence. The man of untruthfulness in common conversation. Such men are always punished in one way or another. Nothing is more frequently inculcated in Holy Scripture than the practice of truth, justice, and righteousness. The commandments of God are called "truth," because in keeping of them lie our truest advantages and everlasting comforts. All kinds of fraud and deception are abominable in the sight of God, and inconsistent with the ordering of any civil government. For—1. Fraud in commerce and dealing is but a species of robbery. 2. Haughtiness of spirit unfits a man for those offices of meekness, courtesy, and humanity which make society agreeable and easy. 3. No less unsocial is a tongue addicted to calumny, tale-bearing, and detraction. It is impossible for men of these dispositions not to meet with their punishment in their own mischievous ways. The law of Moses requires the judge who discovers any man bearing false witness against another to inflict the same pains upon him as the accused should have suffered had the allegations proved true. Among the Athenians an action lay, not only against a false witness, but also against the party who produced him. The punishment of false witness among the Old Romans was to cast the criminal headlong from the top of the Tarpeian rock. Later false witnesses were branded with the letter K. By our own statute law the false witness is to be imprisoned for six months and fined twenty pounds. This is a short specimen of such human penalties as have been awarded to false witnesses, considered as pests of mankind and enemies of the laws and governments of the respective communities to which they belong. Yet if such receive no correction from the hand of man, they cannot hope to escape the wrath of God. (*W. Reading, M.A.*)

Ver. 7. He pursueth them with words, yet they are wanting to him.—*Coercing men of ill principles*:—This verse prescribes a different method of proceeding against known offenders, according to their different characters. The scorner, who makes a jest of everything sacred, and professes an open contempt of religion, is to be treated with great severity. As to sinners who have not resolved to shut their eyes against the light of truth, we are directed to apply ourselves to them in a more easy, gentle, and humane method of reproof. I. THE REASONABLENESS OF EMPLOYING

THE SECULAR ARM AGAINST THE SCORNER. A sense of religion is the great basis upon which all government stands. The scorner is, therefore, an enemy to the state. The scorner who laughs at the very name and pretence of conscience itself has no claim on the toleration of the state. II. THE OBLIGATIONS WE ARE UNDER TO THE DUTY OF FRATERNAL REPROOF. 1. The obligation of a just concern for the honour and interests of religion. The sins and impieties of men bring a scandal and discredit upon religion. To admonish and reprove them for such sins and impieties is a proper means to prevent that scandal and promote the interests of religion. This is one of the methods which the wisdom of God Himself has appointed in order to reclaim sinners from the evil of their ways. As the wisdom of God has directed this method, societies have been formed by men to concert how it may be most effectually pursued. 2. From the charity we owe to our neighbour. It is to a good man one of the greatest pleasures of this life to do good; then what an exceeding pleasure it must be to be instrumental in recovering a lost soul. (1) Great tenderness and compassion must be used, to give our reproof the greater force and efficacy. (2) Our reproofs must be modest, and free from all hypocritical ostentations. (3) Avoid exposing the offender as much as the rule of charity will admit. (4) Do not give admonitions to superiors the air of reproof. (5) Take care that reproof is seasonable. If this be a duty of so great a nicety, we ought not rashly and unadvisedly to take it in hand, but to consider well whether we be in any good measure qualified for it. Those who find themselves really qualified for it ought not to be discouraged from performing it, though it sometimes expose them to inconvenience or make them incur the odium of those with whom they take so unacceptable a freedom. Let us resolve to discharge a good conscience, and leave the consequences of doing our duty to the disposal of God. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. **He that getteth wisdom loveth his own soul.**—*On getting and keeping wisdom*:—The way of getting this wisdom is to be sensible of our need of it; to trust in Him to whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge belong, for the communication of it; and to be diligent in the use of the means which He hath appointed, and will bless, for conveying it to us. We must not only get, but keep, this precious treasure, retaining it in our hearts, showing it forth in all our behaviour, and refusing to part with it on any account. (*George Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **The discretion of a man deferreth his anger.**—*Anger*:—If any vice is often reprov'd in the Word of God, you may be assured it springs prolific in the life of man. In this book of morals anger is a frequently recurring theme. Anger cannot be cast wholly out of man in the present state. On some occasions we do well to be angry. But the only legitimate anger is a holy emotion directed against an unholy thing. Sin, and not our neighbour, must be its object; zeal for righteousness, and not our own pride, must be its distinguishing character. Although anger be not in its own nature and in all cases sinful, the best practical rule of life is to repress it, as if it were. As usual in these laws of God's kingdom, suffering springs from the sin, as the plant from the seed. The man of great wrath will suffer, although no human tribunal take cognisance of his case. A man of great wrath is a man of little happiness. The two main elements of happiness are wanting; for he is seldom at peace with his neighbour or himself. There is an ingredient in the retribution still more immediate and direct. The emotion of anger in the mind instantly and violently affects the body in the most vital parts of its organisation. When the spirit in man is agitated by anger it sets the life-blood flowing too fast for the safety of its tender channels. The best practical specific for the treatment of anger against persons is to defer it. Its nature presses for instant vengeance, and the appetite should be starved. "To pass over a transgression" is a man's "glory." "Looking unto Jesus" is, after all, the grand specific for anger in both its aspects, as a sin and as a suffering. Its dangerous and tormenting fire, when it is kindled in a human breast, may be extinguished best by letting in upon it the love wherewith He loved us. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Discretion*:—This is, strictly speaking, not a moral but an intellectual power. It is simply discernment; discernment and discretion are radically the same words, though cast into different forms. Discernment is the ability to distinguish between things. A discreet man is a man who sees what is to his own interest, and acts accordingly. A man's discretion leads him to discern the men whom he may trust, as distinct from the men whom it is not safe to trust. A man's discretion is of immense service to him in the conduct of life; and if a man have little or no

discretion he comes off very badly: he makes many blunders, sustains many losses, gets into many troubles, which a discreet man entirely escapes. Discretion is the main secret of secular success. But discretion can do some very questionable things. It is great in concealing facts. It is not a very noble property. A man's discretion nurses many old grudges, watching for the right occasion to pay them off. Discretion has a side of cunning and craft, and links with long-deferred anger and revenge. (*Hugh Stowell Brown.*) *Anger*:—If you will always be ready to go off like a loaded gun even by an accident, depend on it you will get into difficulty. (*Scientific Illustrations.*) *Anger controlled and uncontrolled*:—Anger is an affection inherent in our nature. It is, therefore, not wrong in itself; it is wrong only when it is directed to wrong objects, or to right objects in a wrong degree of amount and duration. Anger in itself is as holy a passion as love. Indeed, in its legitimate form it is but a development of love. Love indignant with that which is opposed to the cause of right and happiness. Albeit, like every affection of our nature, it is often sadly perverted, it not unfrequently becomes malignant and furious. I. CONTROLLED. "The discretion of a man deferreth his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." The wise man is liable to the passion, and circumstances in his life occur to evoke it. Instead of acting under its impulse, he waits until its fires cool. It is said of Julius Cæsar that when provoked he used to repeat the whole Roman alphabet before he suffered himself to speak; and Plato once said to his servant, "I would beat thee but I am angry." It is noble to see a man holding a calm mastery over the billows of his own passions, bidding them to go so far and no farther. He who governs himself is a true king. We have anger here—II. UNCONTROLLED. The text suggests two remarks in relation to uncontrolled anger. 1. It is sometimes terrible. "The king's wrath is as the roaring of a lion." It is a lamentable fact that kings have shown less command over their evil tempers than have the ordinary run of mankind. Their temper, it is implied, affects the nation. Their anger terrifies the people like the "roar of a lion"; their favour is as refreshing and blessed as the "dew upon the grass." 2. It is always self-injurious. "A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment; for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again." Violent passions ever inflict their own punishment upon their unhappy subjects. They injure the body. It sets the blood flowing too quickly for its narrow channels. But it injures the soul in a variety of ways. Well does Pope say, "To be angry is to revenge others' faults upon ourselves." Anger is misery. Dr. Arnold, when at Laleham, once lost all patience with a dull scholar, when the pupil looked up in his face, and said, "Why do you speak angrily, sir? Indeed I am doing the best I can." Years after he used to tell the story to his children, and say, "I never felt so ashamed of myself in my life. That look and that speech I have never forgotten." (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 14. And a prudent wife is from the Lord.—*Divine direction needed in the choice of a wife*:—In the choice of a wife, first of all seek Divine direction. About thirty-five years ago, when Martin Farquhar Tupper urged men to prayer before they decided upon matrimonial association, people laughed. And some of them have lived to laugh on the other side of their mouths. The need of Divine direction I argue from the fact that so many men, and some of them strong and wise, have wrecked their lives at this juncture. Witness Samson and the woman of Timnath. Witness Socrates, pecked of the historical Xantippe. Witness Ananias, a liar, who might perhaps have been cured by a truthful spouse, yet marrying as great a liar as himself—Sapphira. Witness John Wesley, one of the best men that ever lived, united to one of the most miserable women, who sat in City Road Chapel making mouths at him while he preached. Witness the once connubial wretchedness of John Ruskin, the great art essayist, and Frederick W. Robertson the great preacher. On this sea of matrimony, where so many have been wrecked, am I not right in advising Divine pilotage? Especially is devout supplication needed because of the fact that society is so full of artificialities that men are deceived as to whom they are marrying, and no one but the Lord knows. After the dressmaker, and the milliner, and the jeweller, and the hair-adjuster, and the dancing-master, and the cosmetic art have completed their work, how is an unsophisticated man to decipher the physiological hieroglyphics, and make accurate judgment of who it is to whom he offers hand and heart? That is what makes so many recreant husbands. They make an honourable marriage contract, but the goods delivered are so different from the sample by which they bargained. They were simply swindled.

They mistook Jezebel for Longfellow's Evangeline, and Lucretia Borgia for Martha Washington. (*T. De Witt Talmage.*)

Ver. 15. Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep; and an idle soul shall suffer hunger.—Idlers and idleness:—In the big, busy city, the one who seems out of touch with it is the idler. He who has no other business than the wretched one of killing time has no portion, right, or memorial in it; nor has he any right or portion in the age which we are serving. There is the rich idler, who lives to amuse himself. Such provide the demoralising element in our society. They lead the fashion in vice and frivolity. There is the poor idler. There are some who "for the sake of equalising poverty and wealth would really equalise indolence and industry." In our great towns, more than half of our poverty is the result, direct or indirect, of that slothfulness which casts into a deep sleep. There is a hereditary pauperism. There is the poverty of recklessness and thoughtlessness and thriftlessness. A third type of idler is the idle-souled. Busy enough with earth, such have no business with heaven, no business with love, no business even with the ideals of duty. Leisure is very different from idleness. There is no leisure at all when the life is spent in idleness. It is the interval between work and work that gives the helpful leisure. Leisure is good, idleness is bad. Above all things, avoid heart indolence, moral and spiritual indolence, the indolence of the soul. (*J. Marshall Lang, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. But he that despiseth his ways shall die.—The folly of despising our own ways:—I. THE SINNER'S FALL AND RUIN. "He shall die." There is a death that is common to all mankind. That is the general effect of sin. But there is a death which is the particular lot of impenitent sinners. This is—1. A spiritual death, which is, being cut off from all communion with God. 2. An eternal death. This is but the perfection of the former. This second death is a real thing, and a fearful thing, and it is very near to all who are going on still in their trespasses. II. THE SINNER'S FAULT AND FOLLY WHICH BRINGS HIM TO THIS RUIN. "Despising his own ways." When may we be said to despise our own ways? When we are altogether unconcerned about the end of our ways. When we are indifferent about the rule of our ways, and the measures by which we govern ourselves in them. Those certainly despise their ways who walk at all adventures, and live at large when they should walk circumspectly and live by rule. God has given us the Scriptures to be the guide of our way. He has appointed conscience to be a monitor to us concerning our way. When we are wavering and unsettled in the course and tenor of our ways, then we despise them. If we do not apply ourselves to God in our ways, and acknowledge Him, we despise our own soul. When we are careless of our past ways and take not the account we ought to take of them. When we are heedless and inconsiderate as to the way that is before us, and walk at all adventures. If we are in no care to avoid sin, or to do our duty. III. THE FOOLISHNESS AND DANGER OF DESPISING OUR OWN WAYS. 1. The God of heaven observes and takes particular notice of all our ways. 2. Satan seeks to pervert our ways. 3. Many eyes are on us that are witnesses to our ways. 4. According as our ways are now, it is likely to be ill or well with us to eternity. Application: 1. Caution not to be rigid and severe in our censures of other people's ways. 2. Let it charge us to look well to our own ways. Be strict in your inquiries concerning your present ways. Be impartial in your reflections upon your past ways. Be very circumspect and considerate as to the particular paths that are before you. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 17. He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord.—Christian pity for the Christian poor:—I. THE GREAT STRESS WHICH THE SCRIPTURES LAY UPON PITY FOR THE POOR. That man must be a cursory reader of the Bible who does not see that it pervades the Bible. The old dispensation is full of it. In the new dispensation it is brought out still more prominently. II. WHY IS SO GREAT A MASS OF THE LORD'S PEOPLE FOUND AMONG THE POOR? If wealth would have been their blessing, wealth they would have had. God would have this manifested by them—that He considers these things in themselves as nothing. Some part of the mystery is to answer Satan's accusations. And it is for the trial of the grace that is in His people. III. THE MOTIVES URGING A GOOD MAN TO SHOW PITY TO THE POOR. He "lendeth to the Lord." Here is

a payment spoken of. The Lord is a bounteous giver. (*J. H. Evans.*) *The deserving poor* :—We are told that the poor shall never cease out of the land. Paley defines a poor man as he, of whatever rank, whose expenses exceed his resources. It is very clear from this that there may be poverty which has no claim to our commiseration and charity. I. MAN'S DUTY TOWARDS THE DESERVING POOR. "He that hath pity on the poor." Two things are implied concerning this pity. 1. It must be practical. The text speaks of it as lending to the Lord. It is pity, therefore, that gives, that does something to relieve distress. The pity that goes off in sentimental sighs, or goes no farther than words, saying, "Depart in peace, be warmed, be filled," is not true pity—the pity that God demands for the poor. 2. It must be genuine. The words imply that the pity is "accepted of the Lord." He takes it as a loan; therefore it must be genuine. The service rendered is from right principles. There is a large amount of charity shown to the poor which is inspired by motives abhorrent to Omniscient Purity. II. GOD'S INTEREST IN THE DESERVING POOR. God's interest in the poor is shown in three ways. 1. In the obligation that is imposed on the rich to help them. He denounces all neglect and cruelty of the poor. "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness and his chamber by wrong, that useth his neighbour's service without wages." Again, "Whoso mocketh the poor reproacheth his Maker." He inculcates practical sympathy for the poor (Exod. xxii. 21, 22, xxiii. 9; Lev. xix. 33, xxv. 35; Deut. x. 19, xxiv. 19; Prov. xxii. 22; Isa. i. 17-23). 2. In the earthly condition into which He sent His Son. 3. In the class from which He selected His servants. III. THE DIVINE ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF SERVICE TO THE POOR. "And that which he hath given will He pay him again." Every gift of genuine piety to the poor is a loan to the Lord, and a loan that shall be paid. 1. It is often amply repaid in this world (Deut. xvi. 17-20; 2 Cor. ix. 6-8). 2. It will be acknowledged in the day of judgment. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Lending to the Lord* :—We are to give to the poor out of pity. Not to be seen and applauded, much less to get influence over them; but out of pure sympathy and compassion we must give them help. We must not expect to get anything back from the poor, not even gratitude; but we should regard what we have done as a loan to the Lord. He undertakes the obligation, and if we look to Him in the matter we must not look to the second party. What an honour the Lord bestows upon us when He condescends to borrow of us! That merchant is greatly favoured who has the Lord on his books. It would seem a pity to have such a name down for a paltry pittance; let us make it a heavy amount. The next needy man that comes this way, let us help him. As for repayment, we can hardly think of it, and yet here is the Lord's note of hand. Blessed be His name, His promise to pay is better than gold and silver. Are we running a little short through the depression of the times? We may venture humbly to present this bill at the Bank of Faith. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *For long credit* :—A wealthy but niggardly gentleman was waited on by the advocates of a charitable institution, for which they solicited his aid, reminding him of the Divine declaration, "He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will He pay him again." To this he replied, "The security, no doubt, is good, and the interest liberal; but I cannot give such long credit." Poor rich man! the day of payment was much nearer than he anticipated. Not a fortnight had elapsed from his refusing to honour this claim of God upon his substance before he received a summons with which he could not refuse to comply. He was dead. *The best loan* (to the young):—Pity is the feeling of sorrow we find in our hearts when we see a person in trouble or distress. There are two kinds of pity, a wrong and a right. The wrong kind of pity makes people feel without making them do or give. The right kind makes people do or give, as well as feel. What we do for, or give to the poor, God regards as done or given to Himself. What we lend to another we call a loan. There are many different kinds of loans, but that which is lent to the Lord is the best loan. I. BECAUSE HE RECEIVES THE SMALLEST SUMS. II. BECAUSE IT IS SO SAFE. III. BECAUSE HE PAYS GOOD INTEREST. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *Argument for charity* :—This is an argument for charity of wonderful force. No pagan moralist could ever produce a motive for any social duty equal to this. It is sufficient to open the closest fist, and to enlarge the most selfish heart. Can we lose anything by lending it to the Lord? God will be sure to repay what is given to the poor at His command with great increase. The greatest usurer on earth cannot make so much of his money as the man that gives to the poor. (*George Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 20. Hear counsel and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.—*Instruction and counsel placed before the young*:—I. THE ADVICE GIVEN. These two things in the text will be found to imply all that is valuable in principle and all that is useful in practice. What is here meant is not the history of the world, the instructions of science, or the general field of literature; but the principles and instructions of religion. The Word of God discovers evidences of the fact that there must be such a being as God. It gives instruction concerning the government of God and concerning man. What is the distinction between counsel and instruction? Instruction consists in the communication of right principles; counsel in the advice by which you may apply these principles practically. II. LOOK TO THE END TO BE OBTAINED BY RECEIVING THE INSTRUCTION, AND HEARING THE COUNSEL. The benefit here stated—wisdom in the latter end—is a benefit of the greatest importance; it delivers you from the disgrace of sin, of growing up a foolish old man in the midst of so many opportunities of acquiring the blessings of instruction. (*J. Burnet.*)

Ver. 21. There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless, the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.—*Devices and counsel*:—It being impossible for us to know God absolutely, the highest degree of knowledge we can hope to attain unto is by way of comparison with ourselves and other creatures. But because we fail in right knowledge of ourselves, we fail also in right knowledge of God. We think God is altogether such an one as ourselves, and yet we do not know what we ourselves are. The subject introduced by this text is, the difference between the devices of a man and the counsel of the Lord. I. THE DIFFERENCES. 1. In the names. Devices, imaginations, fancies, chimæras, "castles in the air." The vanity of men's fancies is seen in our ordinary dreams. The name of devices is too high an appellation to bestow upon our vain imaginations, if we knew a worse; so the name of counsel is too low to bestow upon God Almighty's eternal purpose, if we knew a better. 2. In the number. Ours are devices—in the plural; His but one—counsel in the singular. Men's purposes are various and changeable. It is the honour of God that His counsel is but one, and unchangeable. The immutability of His counsel. With God there is no after-counsel, to correct the errors of the former. 3. The efficacy. Seen in their different manner of existing. The devices of man are in his heart, but he cannot make them stand. The counsel of the Lord "shall stand"; nothing can hinder it from having its intended effect. The foundation of God standeth firm. II. THE REASONS FOR THESE DIFFERENCES. 1. God is the *prima causa*, the sovereign agent, and first mover in every motion and inclination of the creature. God so orders the vain things of man's devices by His overruling providence as to make them subservient to His everlasting counsels. 2. God's eternity. Man is but of yesterday, and his thoughts casual. As himself is mutable, fickle, and uncertain, so are the things he hath to do with subject to contingencies and variations. But the nature of the Godhead is not subject to mutability. All change is either for the better or for the worse, but God cannot change for the better, because He is already best; nor for the worse, for then He should cease to be best. 3. The wisdom of God. Besides their natural ignorance, through precipitancy, misinformation, prejudice, partial affections, and other causes, they are subject to very many mistakes and aberrations. God alone is wise. He will not deceive, being of infinite goodness; He cannot be deceived by any, being of infinite wisdom. There is no room for second thoughts or after-counsels. 4. The power of God. It is not in the power of man to remove those obstacles which prevent his accomplishing his devices, but the power of God has no bars or bounds other than those of His own will. III. THE INFERENCES. 1. Learn not to trust too much to our own wit; neither to lean to our own understandings; nor to please ourselves over-much in the vain devices, imaginations, fancies, and dreams of our own hearts. 2. However judgment may begin at the house of God, most certain it is that it shall not end there. 3. This is a comfortable consideration to all those that with patience and cheerfulness suffer for the testimony of God, or a good conscience, and in a good cause, under the insolences of proud and powerful persecutors. God can curb and restrain their malice, when they have devised wicked devices. 4. It is well for us, and our bounden duty, to submit to such sufferings as God shall call us to. Give up thyself faithfully to follow the good counsel of God in His revealed will; and then give up thy desires entirely, to be disposed by His wise counsel in His secret will; and He shall undoubtedly give thee thy heart's desire. If we submit our wills to His, both in doing and suffering,

doubtless we cannot finally miscarry. He will consult nothing but for our good ; and what He hath consulted must "stand." (*Bp. Sanderson.*) *Man's devices and God's counsel* ;—A "man's heart" is a little world, full of scheming and business. Let a man have a full inspection of his heart, its "devices," its schemes, its designs, in their succession. Notice the variety in the kinds of devices, and in men's temper and manner in respect to them. Some men are very communicative of their heart's devices ; others are close, reserved, dark. Suppose that all the devices of all men could be brought out, in full manifestation, then you would have human nature displayed in its real quality. What manner of spectacle would it be ! Suppose that all these devices could be accomplished. What a world you have then ! One man's devices cannot be accomplished compatibly with the accomplishments of another's. The great collective whole of the "devices" of all hearts constitutes the grand complex scheme of the human race for their happiness. To every device of all hearts, God's "counsel," His design, exists parallel, whether in coincidence or in opposition. In other words, respecting the object of every device, He has His design. The text implies a great disconformity—a want of coalescence between the designs of man and God ; an estranged spirit of design on the part of man. I. THE DESIGNS OF MEN'S HEARTS ARE FORMED INDEPENDENTLY OF GOD. In what proportion of men's internal devisings may we conjecture that there is any real acknowledgment of God ? Man's devising and prosecuting are in such a spirit as if there were no such thing as Providence to aid or defeat. It is deplorable to see dependent, frail, short-sighted creatures confidently taking on themselves the counsel, execution, and hazard of their schemes for being happy, in the very presence, and as in contempt, of the all-wise and almighty Director. II. MAN'S HEART ENTERTAINS MANY DEVICES IN CONTRARIETY TO GOD. It can cherish devices which involve a rebellious emotion of displeasure, almost resentment, that there is a Sovereign Lord, whose "counsel shall stand." There is one other Mind, which has the knowledge and command of all things, a fixed design, respecting them all, paramount to all designs and devices. The counsel of the Lord sometimes is, not to prevent man's designs taking effect in the first instance. He can let men bring their iniquitous purposes into effect, and then seize that very effect, reverse its principle of agency, and make it produce immense, unintended good. But in other cases God directly frustrates them. Some devise to oppose religion ; others to baffle the practical measures taken for promoting religion ; others strive to get rid of the strictness of the laws of God. There are also many projects for temporal good, and in a right spirit, which nevertheless are disappointed and fail, so that we have humbly and complacently to repose in the determination of our God as to what is best. (*John Foster.*) *The decrees of God, or impressive impressions* :—The Westminster divines say, "The decrees of God are His eternal purpose, according to the counsel of His will, whereby for His own glory He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass." This embraces three propositions. I. THERE ARE DECREES OF GOD. God must have formed a plan by which to conduct all His operations. God knows the arrangements upon the accomplishment of which He has determined. The word "decree" is of the same meaning as the word "determine." II. THE DECREES OF GOD ARE ALL INVOLVED IN ONE ETERNAL PURPOSE. All the future, and everything included in all the future, is at once and for ever before the glance of His eye. III. THE DECREES OF GOD WERE ALL FORMED ACCORDING TO THE COUNSEL OF HIS WILL. Who can comprehend all that the counsel of His will embraced as to things decreed to exist ? IV. THE DECREES OF GOD TAKE EFFECT IN EVERYTHING THAT COMES TO PASS. This has its illustration in—1. God's works of creation. 2. God's works of providence. 3. God's works of grace. Objections to this explanation of the decrees of God may be taken. (1) Some say that this doctrine annihilates man's responsibility. (2) Some say, "Then if we are to be saved, we shall be saved ; and if to be lost, lost." But this is a gross perversion of gospel truth. The means, through the appointed use of which eternal life may be obtained, should be diligently and unweariedly cultivated. (*Thomas Adam.*) *The devices of man and the counsel of God* :—Two parts in this text—the proposition and the qualification. I. THE PROPOSITION. 1. The property mentioned. "Many devices" ; by which we may understand "conceits" or "contrivances." Man by nature is very apt and prone to these, whether in matter of apprehension or resolution. Reference here is specially to vain and foolish, or wicked and sinful, devices, which man easily frames, since he voluntarily and wilfully forsook the counsel of God. The variety of man's devices from the impetuousness and unsatiableness which is commonly in

men's desires; from the levity and inconstancy which is upon men's souls; from a variety of lusts, and corrupt and inordinate principles, with which the heart of man is cumbered. 2. The subject of this property, man, and precisely, the heart of man. Devices seem to belong to the head rather than to the heart. The heart is here put for the whole mind and soul. The devices are in the heart originally, as the spring and fountain of all. Men's opinions and conceits take their rise first from their heart. II. THE QUALIFICATION. 1. The simple assertion. The counsel of God may be the Word and truth of God, or the purpose and decree of God. 2. The additional opposition or correction of it. "Nevertheless." Here is the consistence of God's counsels with man's. Though man has his devices, God will have His. Because man has his devices, therefore God the rather has His. His counsel is even promoted by man's devices. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Man's devices and God's overrulings*:—I. MEN PROJECTING. They keep their designs to themselves, but they cannot hide them from God. There are devices against God's counsels, without His counsels, and unlike His counsels. Men are wavering in their devices, and often absurd and unjust; but God's counsels are wise and holy, steady and uniform. II. GOD OVERRULING. His counsel often breaks men's measures, and baffles their devices; but their devices cannot in the least alter His counsel, nor disturb the proceedings of it, nor put Him upon new counsels. What a check does this put on designing men, who think they can outwit all mankind! There is a God in heaven who laughs at them! (*Psa. ii. 4.*) (*Matthew Henry.*) *Human devices*:—I. THE DEVICES OF MEN'S HEARTS. The heart of man is a little world of scheming, and planning, and business. We are always devising. II. THE VANITY OF THESE DEVICES. Our safety consists in their being kept in. They could not be suffered to come forth but at the expense of the ruin of the world. They cannot all be accomplished, because they oppose each other. III. THE COUNSEL OF THE LORD OVERRULING THESE DEVICES. Amidst all these various devices, there is one mighty will going on. All human devices serve God's counsel. Therefore we should seek to have our devices in principle compatible with God's counsel. (*The Evangelist.*) *The mind of man and the mind of God*:—I. The mind of man has MANY DEVICES; the mind of God has but ONE COUNSEL. II. The mind of man is SUBORDINATE, the mind of God SUPREME. 1. This is a fact well attested by history. 2. This is a fact that reveals the greatness of God. III. The mind of man is CHANGEABLE, the mind of God UNALTERABLE. Lessons: 1. The inevitable fall of all that is opposed to the will of God. 2. The inevitable fulfilment of all God's promises. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 22. **The desire of a man is his kindness: and a poor man is better than a liar.**—*Circumstances or character*:—The imperial standard of weights and measures has been sent by the King into the market-place of human life, where men are busy cheating themselves and each other. Public opinion greatly needs to be elevated and rectified in its judgments of men and things. Society is like a house after an earthquake. Everything is squeezed out of its place. A standard has been set up in the market-place to measure the pretences of men withal, and those who will not employ it, must take the consequences. According to that standard "a poor man is better than a liar"; if, in the face of that sure index, you despise an honest man because he is poor, and give your confidence to the substance or semblance of wealth, without respect to righteousness, you deserve no pity when the inevitable retribution comes. Error in this matter is not confined to any rank. "Do not cheat" is a needful and useful injunction in our day; and "Do not be cheated" is another. The trade of the swindler would fail if the raw material were not plentiful, and easily wrought. If the community would cease to value a man by the appearance of his wealth, and judge him according to the standard of the Scriptures, there would be fewer prodigies of dishonesty among us. In the Scriptures a dishonest man is called a liar, however high his position may be in the city. And the honest poor gets his patent of nobility from the Sovereign's hand. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The desire of kindness*:—In the Revised Version this sentence reads, "The desire of a man is the measure of his kindness." The Divine rule of weights and measures is the only true one in the sphere of man's duties and obligations. But a principle, however good, must not be strained. A man's kindness is in his heart, not in the measure of the gifts themselves. The hand may be liberal, whilst the heart is illiberal. A desire to do good is a Divine emanation. A desire must be content to go as far as it can, and to do as much as it can. When that limit is reached, we must not be ashamed of doing so little.

The desire to be kind is worth cherishing, because it does not always survive the changes in our circumstances. The desire often diminishes in exact proportion to the increase of means and opportunities for doing good. Where our desire to be kind fails through incapacity to do more, God will add what is necessary. The desire to be kind sometimes needs educating. It is not so large as it should be, because it is narrowed by ignorance or want of thought about the responsibilities of wealth. When will men study as earnestly how to use what they have got together as they studied and toiled to get it together? (*Thomas Wilde.*)

Ver. 23. The fear of the Lord tendeth to life.—*The happy life*:—Godliness has “the promise of the life that now is.” It might have been otherwise. Infinite Benevolence would have His saints to be happy. As God is the source of all happiness in heaven, so all contact with God brings happiness here. **I. THE FEAR OF THE LORD.** Not that dread of God that is in a sense innate in every unconverted and unregenerate soul, nor that dread which comes into the heart of man when the Holy Spirit opens up the law of God to him, nor the dread that comes into the heart of an unfaithful and backsliding Christian. This is the fear of a child, wrought in the soul by the Spirit. This fear comes from a view of Jesus, from a sight of God in Christ. **II. GREAT BLESSINGS CONNECTED WITH THIS FEAR.** **1.** This fear tendeth to life; that is, to prolong life, and that a true life. **2.** He that hath it shall abide satisfied. There is some satisfaction in lower things, but not abiding satisfaction. Everything connected with the service of God has an unutterable blessing in it. **3.** He shall not be visited with evil. Though there may come to him a thousand things that seem only evil, not one real evil shall befall him. (*J. H. Evans, M.A.*) *The blessedness of the fear of the Lord*:—Life, satisfaction, freedom from evil! What more can be wanted? And what is there that can bring all this, except the one thing which is mentioned in the text—the fear of the Lord? Oh, why, then, are other things so eagerly sought, and this one thing so lamentably neglected? “The fear of the Lord” often stands in Scripture for the whole of true religion; just as we find “the love of God” or the “keeping of His commandments” put for the same thing. “The fear of the Lord” is that disposition of grace given by His own Spirit to His children whereby they regard Him, their heavenly Father, with a holy awe and reverence and filial dread of offending Him. Of the wicked it is said that “there is no fear of God before his eyes.” He lives, he acts, he speaks, he meditates evil, as if there were no God observing and taking account of his every thought and word and deed. **I. “THE FEAR OF THE LORD TENDETH TO LIFE.”** The fear of the Lord, in many cases, “prolongeth days” even in this world. For while “the wicked and the sinner” often, through his own transgressions and excesses, shortens his life, and perhaps does not “live out half his days,” the fear of the Lord frequently, through His blessing, brings health and long life. It does so partly through the temperance and well-regulated habits to which it leads, and partly through the peace, contentment, and happiness which it causes to the mind, and which are better than medicine for the health of the body. **II.** But now let us observe the next thing which is said in connection with the fear of the Lord: “HE THAT HATH IT SHALL ABIDE SATISFIED”; not only shall he, but shall abide, satisfied. Satisfaction, thorough, abiding satisfaction—is not this the thing which every soul of man desires above all the things that can be named? Riches, honour, power, pleasure, all the so-called goods of earth—are these things desired, even by the most worldly, for their own sake? or are they not coveted rather for the sake of the satisfaction which it is secretly thought they will furnish? But do they, can they furnish satisfaction? Alas! how often do the choicest and most valued earthly prizes wither and crumble in the grasp of those who have attained them! And here we are led to look into the nature and reasons of the abiding satisfaction enjoyed by him that hath the fear of the Lord. Such a person is united to God through Christ. And this being his happy case, he has God in Christ as his “portion” and “exceeding great reward.” And who or what can satisfy as God can? God, the infinite and eternal God, has pleasures, comforts, satisfactions, joys, with which He can so fill the soul as to give it the most perfect and overflowing contentment and happiness, and that for ever and ever. It is true that the complete and absolute perfection of this contentment and happiness cannot be enjoyed in this world of sin and trouble; but still it is equally true that, even here, great and blessed, albeit imperfect and partial, foretastes may be enjoyed of what will be perfect and complete hereafter. **III.** “HE THAT HATH IT SHALL NOT BE VISITED

WITH EVIL." What a blessed and cheering promise, in a world like ours, which is so full of evil! But what are we to understand by this promise? Have not the chosen of God, in multitudes of cases, appeared to inherit even a more than ordinary share of trouble and calamity? Certainly, God has often wrought out wonderful deliverances from such outward evil for His chosen; and every one of them would, doubtless, freely acknowledge that he has never been visited with such things as often or as severely as his sins have deserved. But, on the other hand, it is also undeniable that painful losses, cutting griefs, and sore temptations have visited God's children more or less from the beginning, and at times with remarkable severity. And were not these things "evil"? No, never were any of them really evil to a single one of the true children of God, who feared His name. Though evil in their own nature, they were not evil to them. Even the most trying and painful things work through God's grace for great good in forming the soul to faith and patience, and unworldliness, and humble waiting upon God; so that affliction is made a school of training and most blessed discipline for heaven. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." Yes, there shall no evil happen to the just, no evil that shall hurt his spiritual and eternal interests, no evil which he will think of pronouncing such when he has once quitted this world, where evil is so commonly called good, good evil; and, when he finds himself in that happy state of existence, in which he will no longer "see through a glass darkly," but with clear, full, and perfect vision. (*C. R. Hay, M.A.*) *The fruits of personal religion*:—I. VITALITY. "It tendeth to life." 1. It is conducive to bodily life. 2. It is conducive to intellectual life. Love to God stimulates the intellect to study God and His works. 3. It is conducive to spiritual life. "This is life eternal, to know Thee," &c. II. SATISFACTION. "Shall abide satisfied." 1. It pacifies the conscience. 2. It reconciles to providence. "Not My will, but Thine be done." III. SAFETY. "He shall not be visited with evil." He may have sufferings, but sufferings in his case will not be evils; they will be blessings in disguise. His light afflictions will work out a far more exceeding and eternal glory. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 24. **A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom.—A protest against laziness**:—Most critics substitute the word "dish" for "bosom" here: "A slothful man hideth his hand in his dish." This certainly makes the description of the lazy man more graphic. His repast is provided for him; it is spread before him, but he is too lazy to take it: he drops his hand in the dish. This laziness may be seen in different departments of life. I. IN WORLDLY CONCERNS. II. IN INTELLECTUAL MATTERS. The "dish" of knowledge is laid before a lazy man; he has books, leisure, money, everything in fact to enable him to enrich his mind with knowledge, and train his faculties for distinguished work in the realm of science, but he is too lazy. His mind becomes enfeebled and diseased for the want of exercise. It may be seen—III. IN SPIRITUAL INTERESTS. Gospel provisions are laid before the lazy man. There are the "unsearchable riches of Christ"; but he is too indolent to make any exertion to participate in the heavenly blessings. (*David Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 25. **Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware.—Man chastising the wrong**:—I. WRONG MAY EXIST IN VERY DIFFERENT CHARACTERS. There are three characters mentioned in the passage. 1. "The scorner." The scorner is a character made up of pride, irreverence, and cruelty. He mocks at sin; he scoffs at religion. He looks with a haughty contempt upon those opinions that agree not with his own. 2. "The simple." The simple man is he who is more or less unsophisticated in mind, and untainted by crime. One who is inexperienced, unsuspecting, too confiding, and impressible. 3. "One that understandeth knowledge." This is a character whom Solomon represents in other places as the just man, the wise man, the prudent man—expressions which with him mean personal religion. These three characters, therefore, may comprise the man against religion, the man without religion, and the man with religion. The "scorner" is thoroughly wrong. The "simple" is potentially wrong. He that "hath understanding" is occasionally wrong, or he would not require "reproof." It is implied—II. THAT WRONG IN ALL CHARACTERS SHOULD BE CHASTISED. "Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware; and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge." It is not only the duty of rulers to punish crime, but it is the duty of every honest man to inflict chastisement upon wrong wherever it is seen. The withdrawal of patronage, separation from the offender's

society, social ostracism, the administration of reproof, and the expression of displeasure, are amongst the means by which an honest man, even in his private capacity, can chastise the wrong. III. THAT THE KIND OF CHASTISEMENT SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO CHARACTER. "The scorner" is to be smitten. "Smite a scorner." The man of "understanding" is to be reproofed. Reproof to an inveterate scorner would be useless. IV. THAT THE EFFECTS OF THE CHASTISEMENT WILL VARY ACCORDING TO THE CHARACTER. 1. The chastisement inflicted upon the scorner will be rather a benefit to others than himself. "Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware." Severity towards the incorrigible may act as a warning to others. 2. The chastisement inflicted on the man of understanding is of service to himself. He takes it in good part. Wrong exists everywhere around us. Evil meets us in almost every man we meet. It is for us to set ourselves in strong opposition to it wherever it appears. (*Ibid.*)

Ver 27. Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth to err from the words of knowledge.—*Temptation to perilous listening*.—By the "words of knowledge" understand the principles and dictates of virtue and religion. The wise man's advice amounts to this—That we should be careful to guard against the arts and insinuations of such as set up for teachers of infidelity and irreligion. I. THE SEVERAL TEMPTATIONS WHICH MEN LIE UNDER TO LISTEN TO SUCH INSTRUCTORS. It is one step toward security to see the dangers we are exposed to. Since the fears and apprehensions of guilt are such strong motives to infidelity, the innocence of the heart is absolutely necessary to preserve the freedom of the mind. In the most unhappy circumstances of sin and guilt, religion opens to us a much safer and more certain retreat than infidelity can possibly afford. Vice is not the only root from which infidelity springs. Reason itself is betrayed by the vanity of our hearts, and sinks under the pride and affectation of knowledge. All kinds of laudable ambition grow to be vicious and despicable when, instead of pursuing the real good which is their true object, they seek only to make a show of an appearance of it. Thus it is that ambition for virtue produces hypocrisy; ambition for courage, boastings and unreasonable resentments; ambition for learning and knowledge, pedantry and paradoxes. Another sort of temptation is a kind of false shame, which often, in young people especially, prevails over the fear of God and the sense of religion. When religion suffers under the hard names of ignorance and superstition, they grow ashamed of their profession, and by degrees harden into denying God. II. THE DANGER THAT LIES IN LISTENING TO THESE INSTRUCTORS. Here only speak to such as have not yet made shipwreck of reason and conscience. It is an unpardonable folly and inexcusable perverseness for men to forsake religion out of vanity and ostentation; as if irreligion were a mark of honour and a noble distinction from the rest of mankind. We must answer for the vanity of our reasoning as well as for the vanity of our actions. If the punishments of another life be, what we have too much reason to fear they will be, what words can then express the folly of sin? Consider, therefore, with yourselves, that when you judge of religion, something more depends upon your choice than the credit of your judgment or the opinion of the world. Religion is so serious a thing as to deserve your coolest thoughts, and it is not fit to be determined in your hours of gaiety and leisure, or in the accidental conversation of public places. Trust yourself with yourself; retreat from the influence of dissolute companions, and take the advice of the psalmist, "Commune with your own heart." (*T. Sherlock, D.D.*) Avoid false books and teachers:—The enemies of religion now say that every man in search of truth ought to put himself in a way to hear both sides. Lay it down as a general rule that men ought not to read those books or hear those preachers that inculcate gross errors, *i.e.*, essential errors. The popular pretence that men must hear both sides is an insidious attack on the Bible, a covered insinuation that the Bible is insufficient to enlighten. Every one should early settle his belief in the leading doctrines of the gospel. Why need such an one expose himself to the infection of error. Men are naturally so averse to the truth that it is infinitely dangerous for those not fully confirmed in it to expose themselves to the contagion of error. They ought not to presume so much on their own stability. Men cannot parley with error and be safe. And if the man himself is safe, he ought to consider the injury he may do to others by encouraging the promulgation of dangerous errors. The encouragement of erroneous teachers and books is conspiring against God. Popularly it is said that truth will recommend itself to every man's conscience, and none can be injured by seeing it compared with error. In answer, it

may be said—1. This is founded on a principle which men would not admit in any other case. 2. The objection would be less deceptive if in matters of religion men were more inclined to truth than to error. 3. The retailers of false doctrine do not state things candidly. 4. The antidote to error does not always go along with the error itself. 5. Facts speak decisively against the encouragement of false books and teachers, under the pretence mentioned in the objection. Apply—1. To those who profess to be the friends of God and established in the truth. Do not encourage the promulgation of known errors. 2. To such as are not established in religious opinions. Get established without delay. Error in every form is couching to make you his prey. Beware of an indiscreet desire to read every new book and to hear every new preacher. (*E. D. Griffin, D.D.*) *A protest against the immoral* :—Socrates often frequented the theatre, which brought a great many thither out of a desire to see him. On which occasion it is recorded of him that he sometimes stood to make himself the more conspicuous, and to satisfy the curiosity of the beholders. He was one day present at the first representation of a tragedy of Euripides, who was his intimate friend, and whom he is said to have assisted in several of his plays. In the midst of the tragedy, which had met with very great success, there chanced to be a line that seemed to encourage vice and immorality. This was no sooner spoken, but Socrates rose from his seat, and without any regard to his affection for his friend or to the success of the play, showed himself displeased at what was said, and walked out of the assembly. (*The Tailor.*)

CHAPTER XX.

VER. 1. Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging : and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.—*The evil effects of drunkenness* :—I. IT DEADENS EVERY MORAL SENSIBILITY. And what is the evidence of the drunkard himself? On his own declaration, are the principles of virtue as vigorous in his heart now as before? Is he as sensible of delight in contemplating the morally sublime, as much shocked with the morally deformed, as much grieved and disgusted with the depraved and licentious? II. IT IMPAIRS EVERY INTELLECTUAL FACULTY. III. IT ACCELERATES DEATH. IV. IT ENTAILS MISERY ON FAMILIES. V. IT TERMINATES IN EVERLASTING DESTRUCTION (1 Cor. vi. 10). (*The Weekly Christian Teacher.*) *Strong drink deceptive* :—The characteristic of strong drink is deceitfulness. 1. A great quantity of precious food is destroyed that strong drink may be extracted from the rubbish. 2. The curative and strengthening properties of our strong drinks, which are so much vaunted, are in reality next to nothing. 3. Strong drink deceives the nation by the vast amount of revenue that it pours into the public treasury. 4. In as far as human friendship is, in any case, dependent on artificial stimulant for the degree of its fervency, it is a worthless counterfeit. 5. Its chief deception lies in the silent, stealthy advances which it makes upon the unsuspecting taster, followed, when the secret approaches have been carried to a certain point, by the sure spring and deathly grip of the raging lion. (*IV. Arnot, D.D.*) *Mischief and folly of drunkenness* :—I. THE MISCHIEF. To the sinner himself. It mocks him, makes a fool of him, promises him that satisfaction which it can never give him. In reflection upon it: it rages in his conscience. It is raging in the body, putting the humours into a ferment. Pretending to be a sociable thing, it renders men unfit for society, for it makes them abusive with their tongues and outrageous in their passions. II. THE FOLLY. He that is deceived thereby, that suffers himself to be drawn into this sin, when he is so plainly warned of the consequences of it, is not wise: he shows that he has no right sense or consideration of things; and not only so, but he renders himself incapable of getting wisdom; for it is a sin that infatuates and besets men and takes away their heart. (*Matthew Henry.*) *Total abstinence* :—The following story is told of General Harrison, one of the candidates for the Presidency of the United States, in connection with a public dinner given him on one occasion: "At the close of the dinner one of the gentlemen drank his health. The General pledged his toast by drinking water. Another gentleman offered a toast, and said, 'General, will you not favour me by taking a glass of wine?' The General, in a very gentlemanly way, begged to be excused. He was again urged to join in a glass of wine. This was too much. He rose from

his seat and said in the most dignified manner: "Gentlemen, I have twice refused to partake of the wine-cup. I hope that will be sufficient. Though you press the matter ever so much, not a drop shall pass my lips. I made a resolve when I started in life that I would avoid strong drink. That vow I have never broken. I am one of a class of seventeen young men who graduated together. The other sixteen members of my class now fill drunkards' graves, and all from the pernicious habit of wine-drinking. I owe all my health, my happiness, and prosperity to that resolution. Would you urge me to break it now?" *Better sink than drink*:—A clergyman complained to the late Sir Andrew Clark of feeling low and depressed, unable to face his work, and tempted to rely on stimulants. Sir Andrew saw that the position was a perilous one, and that it was a crisis in the man's life. He dealt with the case, and forbade resort to stimulants, when the patient declared that he would be unequal to his work, and ready to sink. "Then," said Sir Andrew, "sink like a man." *Abstinence favourable to health*:—The working man's capital is health, not wealth. It does not consist in landed property, but in sinew and muscle; and if he persist in the use of intoxicating liquors they will strike at the very root of his capital—a sound physical constitution. After this is lost he becomes unfit for the workshop, for no master will employ a man who wants capital. He has then to repair to the poorhouse or infirmary. (*J. Hunter.*) *Water the best drink*:—"The best of all drinks for the athlete," says Dr. Richardson, "is pure water. The athletic lower animals—the racehorse, the hound, the lion, the leopard—thrive well on water, because their bodies, like our own, are water engines, as steam engines are, and that, too, almost as simply and purely."

Ver. 3. It is an honour for a man to cease from strife.—*The law of honour*:—The rules of life by which men are ordinarily governed are the law of honour, the law of the land, and the law of God. It is the object of religious institutions and instruction to uphold the last of these as the supreme and universal rule. In doing this, it is sometimes necessary to bring the other two into a comparison with it, as standards of duty and right. There ought to be no opposition between the law of the land and the commandment of God, and no contradiction to either of them in the sentiment of honour. The word "honour," in its original idea, signifies respect or praise. It is that tribute of good opinion, which attends a character thought to be commendable. It is the external expression of the respect which is conceived to be due. The man of true honour is the man of real desert—the man who has this sense of character because he is conscious that his integrity of purpose and uprightness of life give him a claim to the honour which is always rendered to such a character. His sense of honour is sense of desert, rather than desire of reputation. Proceeding from this origin, it will appear that the characteristic ideas comprised in the sentiment of honour are, self-respect and respect for others. Such a man, valuing himself on the dignity of his nature, which others have in common with himself, conducts himself toward them as he desires that others should do toward him, in the spirit of apostolic injunction, "Honour all men." He thinks himself less disgraced by its omission on their part than on his own. He is rather ready to defer to others, agreeably to the other injunction, "In honour preferring one another." He yields, in this spirit of mutual respect, something to his fellows beyond what he thinks it necessary to insist on receiving. It is thus a generous spirit: it always consults the feelings of others; desires their happiness; guards their reputation; shuns wrong toward any one as the first disgrace; strives for right as the chief honour. Taken in this sense, the sentiment in question is a suitable one for man, and seems to have been designed in the constitution as one of the guardians of his virtue. When thus enlisted on the side of right it becomes a high instinct, prompting to spontaneous rectitude, and causing an intuitive shrinking from whatever is unworthy and base. It contradicts no law of man, and is in harmony with the law of God. But, at the same time, from its intimate connection with what is personal in interest and feeling, it is greatly exposed to degenerate into a false and misleading sentiment. And so it has, in fact, happened. Connecting itself with the notions of character which prevail by chance in the community, rather than with the rule of light and of God, it has erected a false standard of estimate, and kindled a light that leads astray. Thus honour comes to bear the same relation to virtue that politeness does to kindness; it is its representative; it keeps up the form and pretension when the principal is absent; and, for all the ordinary purposes of the superficial social system of the world, it is accounted quite as good as that which it stands for. This, then, is the first objectionable

trait in the world's law of honour as a rule of life; it is deceptive and superficial; it is a thing of appearance only, and not a reality. And from this the descent is natural and easy, down to the next ill quality. Setting the value which it does on appearance, it finds the object of right gained by seeming to be right; then the heinousness of wrong may be avoided by concealing the wrong. The man has learned to act, not with a view to doing right, but with a view to reputation—sometimes even for the appearance of having the reputation. Thus it appears that a man of worldly honour may be guilty of a certain degree of baseness and crime without inconsistency and without compunction, if he have but the skill to keep it from being known. It is not wonderful that it should soon follow from this that he may be guilty of certain sorts of baseness and crime openly, and yet not forfeit his reputation. And such is the fact. One may be a gambler to a certain extent, and actually ruin a friend and drive him to despair—yet no impeachment of his honour. He may be unprincipled in his expenditures, so that the poor whom he employs shall be unable to obtain of him their just dues; he may revel in luxury, while defrauding the mechanics and tradesmen on whose ingenuity and toil he lives—yet no impeachment of honour. He may be a known debauchee, trampling on the most sacred rights and affections of his own home; he may, by a process of deliberate, heartless cunning and fraud, bring down a humble beauty to hopeless disgrace and misery; he may be, on a very trivial offence, the murderer of his friend—yet not one nor all of these crimes, accompanied as they are with what is mean and base, takes from him his claim to be treated as a man of honour. 1. The spirit of worldly honour is thus evidently characterised by selfishness. Its fundamental idea is a reference to what the world will think of me; my reputation, my standing—how are they affected? What will secure them in the eyes of the world? Everything must give way to this paramount consideration. I must secure my own good name among those with whom I move, come what may. It is amazing what deeds are done in consequence! 2. It is equally distinguished for its jealousy. Selfishness is always jealous. It cannot have anything of sincere and generous confidence in others. The man whose rule of life is to refer everything to its bearing on its own reputation, to weigh all the words and looks of other men with a view to discover whether they sufficiently acknowledge his claims to consideration acquires thereby an unreasonable sensitiveness of feeling, nourishes an uneasy spirit of jealous suspicion, is annoyed by slight causes, and offended by trifling inadvertences. 3. Thus jealous and revengeful, it is not surprising that the system in question should be despotic also. Such tempers are always so. It rules with arbitrary, inexorable, uncompromising sway. It allows no wavering, no relenting, no appeal. The slave is not more entirely deprived of his right over his own limbs and labour than the devotee of honour is deprived of a right to his own judgment in all things within her province. He is in the hands of the ministers of honour, and they allow him no retreat. He must go on by that rule which he has adopted. The terrors of disgrace and ruin await him if he draw back. And thus, willing or unwilling—like a victim to the sacrifice—he is led out and immolated on the altar at which he had been proud to worship. This is the consummation to which the system leads. The duel is its tribunal and its place of execution. Worthy close of the progress we have described! It is fit that what began in meanness should issue in blood. The pulpit, beneath which so many young men sit while forming the characters by which they are to influence their country and their fellow-men during many future years of active and public life, would be false to its momentous trust if, at such a moment as this, it failed to lift its warning cry; if it did not attempt to disabuse their minds of the delusive fascination with which the reckless spirit of worldly honour is too often invested. The halls of learning, where Philosophy teaches, and Science utters truth, and Christianity communicates the law of brotherhood and love, would be unworthy of their lofty place if they did not resound with the proclamation that all those great and deathless interests denounce and abhor the masked impostor that, under the name of honour, opens to the aspiring young the highway of sin and death. And therefore it is that I have sought to tear away its disguise and expose its deformity; therefore it is that I would bring forward in its place the true honour, founded in right—exercised in self-respect and respect for all—faithful to all trusts alike—fearing only God. Let the future men of our country hear, and make it theirs. (*H. Ware, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.—*The present and the future* :—The present is

intimately related to the future; and the future will faithfully reflect the character. Here is a principle from the operation of which none can escape. Life stands in the same relation to eternity as the time of ploughing does to the harvest. If this life is spent in neglect of the soul, there will be eternal poverty. I. LIFE'S PLOUGHING-TIME, OR THE PERIOD OF PREPARATION. 1. Note, that life is the seed-time is universally recognised and taught. The armer knows the time for preparing the soil, and is himself responsible if he does not improve it. 2. The ploughing-time is short, not too long if it is all well spent; the seasons quickly succeed each other. How short is life—(1) Comparatively. Fifty, sixty, seventy years, what is it to look back upon? (2) Actually in numberless instances. (3) Possibly in your case how uncertain is the time of death! 3. Though short, it is long enough. Life is short; there is no time to lose, but to each is given space for repentance. 4. Unlike the farmer, who may miss one harvest but secure the next, our opportunity once lost never returns. II. THE PALTRY REASONS ASSIGNED AS AN EXCUSE FOR NEGLECT. "The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold." It is palpably unreal, the true reason is unconfessed; but it is found in the fact that the man is a sluggard—he loves not his work. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The sluggard in harvest*.—This saying inculcates the lesson t at men should diligently seize the opportunity whilst it is theirs. The sluggard is one of the pet aversions of the Book of Proverbs. The text contains principles which are true in the highest regions of human life. Religion recognise the same practical common-sense principles that daily business does. I. THE PRINCIPLES WHICH ARE CRYSTALLISED IN THIS PICTURESQUE SAYING. 1. Present conduct determines future conditions. Life is a series of epochs, each of which has its destined work, and that being done, all is well; and that being left undone, all is ill. What a man does, and is, settles how he fares. The most trivial act has an influence on all that comes after, and may deflect a man's whole course into altogether different paths. There come to each of us supreme moments in our lives. And if, in all the subordinate and insignificant moments we have not been getting ready for them, but have been nurturing dispositions and acquiring habits, the supreme moment passes us by, and we gain nothing from it. The mystic significance of the trivialities of life is that in them we largely make destiny, and that in them we wholly make character. 2. The easy road is generally the wrong road. There are always obstacles in the way to noble life. Self-denial and rigid self-control, in its two forms—of stopping your ears to the attractions of lower pleasures, and of cheerily encountering difficulties—is an indispensable condition of any life which shall at the last yield a harvest worth the gathering. Nothing worth doing is done but at the cost of difficulty and toil. 3. The season let slip is gone for ever. Opportunity is bald behind, and must be grasped by the forelock. Life is full of tragic might-have-beens. II. FLASH THE RAYS OF THESE PRINCIPLES ON ONE OR TWO SUBJECTS. 1. In business, do not trust to any way of getting on by dodges, or speculation, or favour, or anything but downright hard work. 2. In your intellects. Make a conscience of making the best of your brains. 3. In the formation of character. Nothing will come to you noble, great, elevating, in that direction unless it is sought, and sought with toil. Don't let yourselves be shaped by accident, by circumstance. You can build yourselves up into forms of beauty by the help of the grace of God. 4. Let these principles applied to religion teach us the wisdom and necessity of beginning the Christian life at the earliest moment. There is a solemn thought still to consider. This life, as a whole, is to the future life as the ploughing-time is to the harvest. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *A beggar in harvest*.—No life is really secular. The sanctification of our labour for the bread that perisheth is one of the purposes of our holy religion. The principles set forth in this text in relation to earthly business have also their application to the spiritual life. 1. Human co-operation is necessary in the beginnings of the religious life. God does not save men as a rule by sudden movements of His Spirit upon their souls without their co-operation with Him. Spiritual ploughing consists of self-examination in the light of God's Word, followed by self-condemnation, the confession and renunciation of sin, and the other exercises of repentance. 2. Human co-operation in the Divine life is necessary all the way from the beginnings of repentance up to the throne of glory. 3. The text teaches not only the necessity for diligence, but also for courage. The sluggard was afraid of the cold. 4. The ploughing must be done at the right season. Youth is the best time for spiritual ploughing. (*G. A. Bennetts, B.A.*) *The soul-sluggard*.—The words "sluggard" and "sluggish" have the same derivation. We speak of sluggish water, stagnant, covered with

green, breeding disease and death. What a contrast to a fountain of clear, sparkling water, dancing in the sunlight, quickening everything it touches into life! The soul's harvest is in eternity. Why does the sinner neglect preparation for this harvest? Let us look at a few of his reasons. 1. He says that his heart is "cold"; he has not the proper feeling. He forgets—(1) That duty is a debt. The taxpayer does not wait for feeling before he pays the assessment. (2) Work in the line of duty brings feeling, warmth. Friction begets heat. If you lack feeling, search for some unpleasant duty and discharge it. 2. The sinner urges, "The Church is 'cold.'" He says, "No one speaks to me about my soul." Does the traveller at the railway station wait till the train starts and the ticket-office closes because "no one speaks to him"? It is frivolous reasoning, that because Church members fail in their duty I have a right to fail in mine. 3. It is even urged by the impenitent that God is "cold"—indifferent to their salvation. They wait until He is ready—until He moves upon their hearts. Observe—1. The reasons urged by the impenitent are but shallow pretexts to hide their disinclination. The man would not plough because he was a sluggard. 2. "Therefore," says the text, "shall he beg." The begging is the effect of a sufficient cause. Eternal death is not the result of an accident. 3. They that beg in harvest shall beg in vain, "and have nothing." The prayer of Dives was not answered. (P. S. Davis.) *Good effects of honest and earnest toil*:—I. **PLENTY**. We must not think that diligence is only manual; it is also mental. It implies thought, forethought, planning, arranging. The general rule is that they who work obtain the things needful for this life, at least in sufficiency. II. **POWER**. It is industry, rather than genius, which commends us to our fellow-men, and leads us to positions of influence and power. III. **PERSONAL WORTH**. It is diligence, the capacity of taking pains, that gives to a man his actual worth, making him compact and strong and serviceable. The greatest gifts are of little worth, unless there is this guarantee of the conscientious and intelligent employment of them. (R. F. Horton, D.D.) *Duty sacrificed to convenience*:—There are two powers constantly pressing their claims on men: those of duty and convenience. These two generally come into collision here. The sacrificing of duty to convenience is an immense evil, because—I. IT INVOLVES A SACRIFICE OF THE CULTIVATING SEASON. Sluggard neglects the seed-time. It is so with men who postpone their day of religious decision. The whole of their earthly life is intended as a season for cultivation. But a very large portion of the cultivating season is already gone. The residue of their time is very short, and very uncertain. II. BECAUSE IT INVOLVES A DISREGARD OF EXISTING FACILITIES. The sluggard had everything else necessary to cultivate his land. He disregarded all, because it was rather cold. It is so with those who are putting off religion. III. BECAUSE IT INVOLVES THE DECAY OF INDIVIDUAL QUALIFICATION FOR THE WORK. The qualification for any work consists in a resolute determination, and a sufficiency of executive energy. While the sluggard was waiting, these two things were decreasing. IV. BECAUSE IT INVOLVES THE LOSS OF GREAT PERSONAL ENJOYMENT. He would lose the joy arising from fresh accessions of manly power; from the consciousness of having done his duty; a freedom to engage in any other affair; prospect of reward. V. BECAUSE IT INVOLVES A CERTAINTY OF ULTIMATE RUIN. Destitution. Degradation. Misery of these enhanced by their being—1. Self-created. 2. Unpitied. 3. Irretrievable. Physical indolence brings physical ruin, moral indolence moral ruin. (*Homilist*).

Ver. 5. *Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.*—*The getting of wisdom from the wise*:—I. **WISDOM TO MAN IS A VERY VALUABLE THING**. 1. It improves the sphere of his being. 2. It improves the power of his being. II. **SANE MEN ARE FAVOURED WITH MORE WISDOM THAN OTHERS**. The difference in the amount of men's intelligence arises from the difference in their capacities, proclivities, and opportunities for mental improvement. III. **THOSE WHO HAVE THE MOST WISDOM ARE GENERALLY THE MOST RESERVED**. Where knowledge dwells in large quantities, it is not like water on the surface that you can get at easily; it is rather like water that lies fathoms under earth—clear, beautiful, and refreshing—got at only by the pump, or the windlass and bucket. It has to be drawn out. IV. **IN CONSEQUENCE OF THIS RESERVEDNESS OF THE MOST WISE, IT REQUIRES SAGACITY IN OTHERS TO DRAW IT FORTH**. Even Christ Himself felt that He could not unfold what was in Him, on account of the ignorance and the prejudice of His auditory. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 6. **Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness; but a faithful man, who can find?**—*On goodness and fidelity*.—I. WHAT ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND BY “GOODNESS” AND A “FAITHFUL MAN”?—Goodness often means the whole of a virtuous or religious temper. In Scripture it is sometimes limited to good affections, and the proper expression of them in our conduct. Goodness here is kindness; and a “faithful man” is one sincere and steady in goodness, who really feels benevolent affections, and is uniform and constant in the practical exercise of them. 1. He is “faithful in goodness,” whose general conduct is kind and beneficent. He is affable and courteous in his ordinary conversation, and never without necessity deliberately says that which may hurt or offend. He does not withhold his bounty till it is wrung from him by importunity. His friendly offices reach men’s spiritual necessities. 2. He is “faithful in goodness” whose goodness flows from an inward, a sincere, and a religious principle. Goodness sufficiently diffusive in its objects and exercises can only be the fruit of the Spirit of God. 3. The man “faithful in goodness” is steady, constant, and persevering in doing good. Important services to others often require much of diligence, self-denial, and disinterestedness. He does good, expecting nothing again. II. WHAT IS SUGGESTED when it is said, “A faithful man, who can find”? 1. He reminds us that this is a character not to be found among unconverted sinners. 2. Faithfulness in goodness is uncommon. 3. Fidelity in goodness in a strict sense, and in full perfection, is not the character of the best saints on this side the grave. III. SOLOMON’S MAXIM, THAT “MOST MEN WILL PROCLAIM EVERY ONE HIS OWN GOODNESS.” Men are prone to disguise their true characters under a deceitful mask, and profess sentiments and affections to which their hearts are utter strangers. There are some who, in proclaiming their own goodness, cannot be charged with gross hypocrisy. They are self-deluded. Let every one press after the fidelity in goodness, to which every false display of it is opposed. (*John Erskine, D.D.*) *Self-applause and self-consistency*.—I. THE COMMONNESS OF SELF-APPLAUSE. See it in nations; in churches. Pursue the subject more personally. 1. The profane. These say they mean well; their hearts are good; they are liberal, &c. 2. The Pharisees. What attempts they make to recommend themselves to others! 3. The orthodox. Those who pride themselves on their orthodoxy. 4. The godly. These are often guilty in a measure. II. THE RARENESS OF SELF-CONSISTENCY. A man faithful—1. In his civil concerns. 2. In his friendly connections. 3. To his trusts. 4. To his convictions. 5. To his religious professions. Enough has been said—(1) To make Christians thankful that they are not under the law, but under grace. (2) To induce us to be diffident and humble. (3) And to seek after the influence of Divine grace. (*W. Jay.*) *Subtle self-praise*.—Some, quite as vain, and as ambitious of commendation and praise, knowing that everything of the nature of ostentation is exceedingly unpopular, set about their object with greater art. They devise ways of getting their merits made known so as to avoid the flaw of ostentatious self-display. In company they commend others for the qualities which they conceive themselves specially to possess, or for the doing of deeds which they themselves are sufficiently well known to have done; and they turn the conversation dexterously that way; or they find fault with others for the want of the good they are desirous to get praise for; or they lament over their own deficiencies and failures in the very points in which they conceive their excellence to lie—to give others the opportunity of contradicting them; or, if they have done anything they deem particularly generous and praiseworthy, they introduce some similar case, and bring in, as apparently incidental, the situation of the person or the family that has been the object of their bounty. Somehow, they contrive to get in themselves and their goodness. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *A prevalent vice and a rare virtue*.—I. A PREVALENT VICE. “Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness.” Self-conceit—men parading their imaginary merits. It is seen in the religious world, in the way in which certain men get their subscriptions trumpeted in reports, and their charitable doings emblazoned in journals. It is seen in the political world. 1. This vice is an obstruction to self-improvement. The man who prides himself on his own cleverness will never get knowledge; who exults in his own virtue will never advance in genuine goodness. Vanity is in one sense the fruit of ignorance. 2. This vice is socially offensive. Nothing is more offensive in society than vanity. 3. This vice is essentially opposed to Christianity. What says Paul? “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every

man the measure of faith." What says Christ? "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." II. A RARE VIRTUE. "But a faithful man, who can find?" What is faithfulness? The man who in this verse is called faithful is in the next represented as just, "walking in his integrity." Each of the three terms represents the same thing. 1. Practically true to our own convictions. Never acting without or against them. 2. Practically true to our own professions. Never breaking promises, swerving from engagements. Now this is a rare virtue. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Self-laudation*:—It magnifies and multiplies matters. Loud was the lie which that bell told, hanging in a clock-house at Westminster, and usually rung at the coronation and funeral of princes, having this inscription about it:—

‘King Edward made me,
Thirty thousand and three,
Take me down and weigh me,
And more you shall find me.’

But when this bell was taken down at the doom's-day of abbeyes, this and two more were found not to weigh twenty thousand. Many tales of fame are found to shrink accordingly. (*W. Fuller.*)

Ver. 7. His children are blessed after him.—*The just man's legacy*:—1. Anxiety about our family is natural, but we shall be wise if we turn it into care about our own character. If we walk before the Lord in integrity, we shall do more to bless our descendants than if we bequeathed them large estates. A father's holy life is a rich legacy for his sons. (1) The upright man leaves his heirs his example, and this in itself will be a mine of true wealth. How many men may trace their success in life to the example of their parents! (2) He leaves them also his repute. Men think all the better of us as the sons of a man who could be trusted, the successors of a tradesman of excellent repute. Oh, that all young men were anxious to keep up the family name! (3) Above all, he leaves his children his prayers and the blessing of a prayer-hearing God, and these make an offspring to be favoured among the sons of men. God will save them even after we are dead. Oh, that they might be saved at once! 2. Our integrity may be God's means of saving our sons and daughters. If they see the truth of our religion proved by our lives, it may be that they will believe in Jesus for themselves. Lord, fulfil this word to my household! (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 9. Who can say, I have made my heart clean; I am pure from my sin?—*Purity of heart*:—I. WHO CAN SAY, I HAVE MADE MY HEART CLEAN? We read of some who have clean hands, which implies an abstinence from outward sins. A clean heart implies more than this; it relates to the inward temper and disposition, to the bias of the will, and the various operations of the affections, as being spiritual and acceptable in the sight of God. 1. Purity of heart is much to be desired. 2. It is the work of the Spirit alone to impart it. 3. There is so much self-righteous pride and vanity in man that many are apt to think they have made their hearts clean. II. WHO CAN SAY, I AM PURE FROM MY SIN? To be pure from sin is similar to our being in a state of sinless perfection. This no one ever enjoyed in the present life, except Him only who "knew no sin." 1. Who can say that they were never defiled with original sin, or that they are now free from that defilement? 2. Who can say that they are pure from inward sins, the evils of the heart? 3. Who can say that they are wholly free from practical evil in life and conversation? 4. Who can say they are free from every besetting sin, or that they are not defiled with any of those evils to which they are more especially exposed by constitutional habits, or by their occupation or immediate connections. As no one can say with truth that he is pure from his sin, what reason have the best of men to be abased before God! (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *The duty of mortification*:—The trial and examination of our hearts and ways in reference to God is a duty which, though hard and difficult, is exceedingly useful and beneficial to us. I. THE DUTY OF MORTIFICATION. The cleansing of our hearts, to be pure from sin. 1. The nature of the action. Cleansing. A word implying some change and alteration that is to be made in us. That which is purged was formerly impure. God is pure; the saints are purged and purified. This shows us the nature of sin: it is a matter of uncleanness. Uncleanness is a debasing quality; a loathsome quality; a thing odious in itself and for itself. Cleansing

shows the sovereign virtue of **grace** and repentance. It is of a purging virtue. It hath a power of cleansing us from the pollutions of sin. It is compared to clean water, which washes away filth. To a wind, which, passing, cleanseth. To a fire, that consumes dross and corruption. 2. The property of the agent. The text makes us agents in this great work. Sin is cleansed in our justification, when it is pardoned and forgiven. The act of forgiveness is God's alone. Sin is cleansed by mortification, and regeneration, and conversion. The progress of these acts God works in us, and by us. His Spirit enables us to carry forward this work which He graciously begins, and to cleanse ourselves. 3. The circumstance of time. "I have cleansed." Mortification is a work of long continuance; it requires progress and perseverance. II. THE OBJECT THAT MUST BE WROUGHT UPON. "The heart." The whole man must be cleansed, but first and specially the heart. The heart is the fountain and original from whence all other uncleannesses do stream and flow. The heart is the lurking-hole, to which sin betakes itself. The heart is the proper seat and residence of sin. III. THE MEASURE OR DEGREE OF MORTIFICATION. "I am pure from my sin." This is the high aim that a Christian must set to himself, to press forward to perfection. The text lays our sin at our own doors, and so it concerns us to rid ourselves of it. Sin is the offspring of our will. There is the sin of inbred and natural inclination; the sin to which our particular age disposes us: childhood is idle, youth wanton, age covetous; the sins of our calling and vocation: every calling has its special temptations. IV. THE DIFFICULTY OF MORTIFICATION. This question, "Who?" is not meant for all sorts of sinners. It is not propounded to the profane man, to the grossly ignorant man, or to the negligent and careless man. The question reaches to the best sort of men, those that have made good progress in this work of cleansing and mortification, who, nevertheless, are condemned by their own consciences; who have still leaven to purge out; find some sins of surreption will steal in upon them. As to the question itself. It runs thus: "Who can say?" Not "Who doth say?" or "Who will say?" or "Who dare say?" We may safely resolve the question into a peremptory assertion, and conclude that no man is clear or free from sin. The earnest Christian can say, "Through grace I have broken the strength and dominion of sin. (*Bp. Brownrigg.*)

Ver. 10. **Divers weights and divers measures; both of them are alike abomination to the Lord.**—*Caveat venditor*:—I. DISHONESTY IN TRADE IS VARIOUS IN ITS FORMS. "Divers weights and divers measures . . . and a false balance." II. DISHONESTY IN TRADE IS OFFENSIVE TO GOD. 1. Dishonesty is known to Him: His eye is on our business transactions, and no names or pretences, however plausible, can deceive Him. 2. Dishonesty is abhorred by Him. It is "an abomination unto the Lord." III. DISHONESTY IN TRADE IS GREAT FOLLY AND SIN. This seems to be the idea of the latter clause of ver. 23: "A false balance is not good." The man who is dishonest for gain sacrifices—1. The greater for the less. 2. The spiritual for the material. 3. The eternal and permanent for the temporal and uncertain. 4. The Divine for the worldly. Dishonesty is arrant folly; the man who gains by fraud is a great loser. Conclusion: 1. Transact business by the rule laid down by our Lord (Matt. vii. 12). 2. Transact business as in the sight of God. (*W. Jones.*) *Short weights and measures*:—All pound weights do not draw 16 ounces. Every yard stick is not quite 36 inches long. There are multitudes of things short weight, and not a few short measure. If all men were weighed and measured, some of us would need to be placed under short sticks, or require a big "make weight" to bring us up to the right standard. Besides men, there are things not quite full measure. Many things sold and used in Manchester, you may depend upon it, would be "short measure," especially when compared with the standards the excise officers are in the habit of carrying about with them. I have met many men that would weigh 14 stone, but if you try to weigh their common sense it would not reach 14 ounces. There are hundreds of men whose tailors may be able to tell you how much cloth it would take to cover them; their shoemakers could tell you that their feet measured 9, 10, or 11 inches in length; but if you tried to measure all their good deeds—deeds of kindness done at home—deeds of sympathy to those who are poor—acts of love and mercy such as angels delight to see, and God smiles upon—you could do it with a 35-inch stick. And the misfortune is that these people are always the tall talkers. Talking does little work. Talking, minus doing, is minus weight. But there are some men that weigh too much. When I was a lad I used to see butter

sold that was called "long weight." Well, what was that? Eighteen ounces to the pound. I have met men more than 18 ounces to the pound. If they are workmen they can do twice as much as others in the same time. If you talk to them about their wives—there are not such women in the world. Their children are perfect models; their horses are better than their neighbours; and if they go out to buy goods, they can always get more for their money than anybody else, often, indeed, 25s. worth for their sovereign. But get a little nearer to them, and you will find the work they do needs doing over again; as to their children, they are unruly and impudent; whilst the bargains they make are no bargains at all. I want now to look more particularly at men "short weight." [Belshazzar instanced.] Pride? Can a proud man be short weight? Look at him, how big he is! Ah! you can measure some people's pride, and you will get 37 inches to the yard. It takes 24 yards of silk to cover the pride of some women—and it will take 24 months to pay for it. Belshazzar was not the only proud person the world has known. I am afraid that pride exists in these days as well as in those. (*Charles Leach.*) *Divers weights and divers measures*:—Trade tricksters are not called highly respectable in Scripture, whatever they are in society. Apologists for tricks in trade say that the real fault is in the consumer, who will have a cheap article. On which showing, the whole charge of adulteration, and of the wickedness of selling worsted and silk for silk, shoddy for broadcloth, and sloe-juice for vine-wine, is held to amount to nothing. Cicero's rule holds good to-day, that everything should be disclosed, in order that a purchaser may be ignorant of nothing that the seller knows. But few people have leisure for investigating the real quality and quantity of their purchases. It is only necessary, remarks Mr. Emerson, to ask a few questions as to the progress of the articles of commerce from the fields where they grew to our houses, to become aware that we "eat and drink, and wear perjury and fraud in a hundred commodities." Christian critics have been fain to admire in Mohammed the vigour and emphasis with which he inculcated a noble sincerity and fairness in dealing. "He who sells a defective thing, concealing its defect, will provoke the anger of God and the curses of the angels." Every age has its recognised offenders of this sort, from Solomon's days downwards. It was reserved, apparently, for our own age to merit in full the bad eminence of attaining such a pitch of refinement "in the art of the falsification of elementary substances," that the very articles used to adulterate are themselves adulterated. (*F. Jacox, B.A.*)

Ver. 11. Even a child is known by his doings, whether his work be pure, and whether it be right.—*A child's accountability*:—The Bible recovers lost truths, as well as lost souls. The recovery of lost truth is one means of restoring lost souls. It is like a guide in a wilderness, as food in famine, as light in darkness: it is the restoration of that which is useful and essential. The truth of this passage is a lost truth. That human beings are early accountable, and early assume a decided character, is evident to reflection and observation. Apart from the teaching of Scripture, it is a lost truth that a "child is known by his doings." "Child" means a son or daughter under parental control. I. THE ACTIONS OF CHILDREN BECOME, IN PROCESS OF TIME, THEIR OWN DOINGS. Children move before they act, and they live as mere animals before they act spiritually and morally. In process of time the child acts. All its movements become conduct, the result of a determination to behave itself in a particular way. 1. An act which we are justified in describing as right or wrong, and which we can lawfully call the act of an accountable individual, must be performed by a being endowed with the following capacities: He must be able to conceive the act before its performance, mentally to see the thing done before doing it. He must be capable of appreciating motives for and against the action. He must know good and evil. He must have the power of saying, "I will," and "I will not." The "doings" of an individual are those acts which he rationally and intentionally performs. 2. A child, in course of a few years, exhibits the capabilities of which we speak. 3. Then it is, whether it comes early or late, that the actions of a child are his "doings." He now performs the functions of a rational creature. II. WHEN THE ACTIONS OF CHILDREN BECOME THEIR DOINGS THE CHILDREN ARE RECOGNISED AS ACCOUNTABLE. 1. God recognises the child as the author of its own actions: He sees the doings of the child spring from a motive and principle within. He now holds the child guilty for its transgressions of His law. The child is now exposed to punishment; and to escape punishment, a dispensation of mercy to that individual child is

necessary. God's treatment of the child recognises the child's doings. 2. The god of evil knows, by the doings of children, with whom and with what he has to do. He cannot, as God, search the heart, but he can observe the principles, tastes, and inclinations. He studies the child's nature that he may know best how to injure it. 3. The angelic inhabitants of heaven recognise children in their ministrations. A child who is an heir of salvation is known to the angels—they minister to him, performing offices of kindness and services of charity, ordained by the God of love. 4. Children are recognised as accountable by their fellow human beings. Children are known to other children, and known to men.

III. FROM THESE TWO FACTS DRAW CERTAIN INFERENCES. 1. The evils of sin are not escaped by the childhood of the sinner. God does not hold him guiltless because he is a child. But the Supreme Lawgiver does not account the child a man. Sin brings darkness into a child's mind, and disquiet into a child's heart, and gloom over a child's spirit. There are wages paid now, and paid in the spiritual condition of the early sinner, and those wages are death. 2. As a child, he is exerting influence for good or for evil. The measure of the influence is not so considerable as in the case of the adult, but there is influence. 3. All the differences of human character are not traceable to education. Some of these differences may be thus explained, but not all, and not the greatest. The earliest doings of a child do not make manifest his education, but himself. 4. The character of the future man is often indicated by the character of the present child. If the earliest actions of children be observed, they will indicate the character which the child so constituted will form. 5. God does not treat a generation of children *en masse*, but individually. There is a personality about every child. 6. If a child be known by his doings, one test of character is universally employed by the Judge of all. The decisions of the final judgment are according to that a man hath done, whether good or bad. The child and the man are under one Lawgiver. (*E. Martin.*)

Fruit:—We must be good before we can do good. What fruits will be found on that tree which God's Holy Spirit has made a living tree? 1. There will be love to God, which will make you try to please Him, and to care for everything which belongs to your heavenly Father, His book, His house, His day. 2. There will be obedience to parents. Obedience to our parents on earth leads up naturally and pleasantly to obedience to our Father which is in heaven. 3. There will be truthfulness. Two great causes of untruthfulness are cowardice and the habit of exaggeration. Do not use overstrained expressions. Speak in a natural, straightforward, simple way. 4. There will be conscientiousness. The conscientious person will do his best, as in God's sight. He will do his work thoroughly. He will be trustworthy. You may depend upon him. No one can be a Christian unless he is conscientious in his work, and conscientious in all his dealings with others. 5. There will be two things found in you, modesty and temperance. Would you think a pert girl or a saucy boy at all like Christ? By "temperance" I mean self-control, self-restraint. Greediness, the desire to get all you can for yourself, is the opposite of it. Temperance teaches us where to stop—shows us how to keep ourselves within bounds. All these good things are "fruits of the Spirit." (*G. Calthrop, M.A.*)

Children may be known:—A young tree is known by its first fruits, a child by his childish things. 1. Children will discover themselves. One may soon see what their temper is, and which way their inclination leads them, according as their constitution is. Children have not learned the art of dissembling and concealing their bent as grown people have. 2. Parents should observe their children, that they may discover their disposition and genius, and both manage and dispose of them accordingly, drive the nail that will go, and draw out that which goes amiss. Wisdom is herein profitable to direct. (*Matthew Henry.*)

The child's fortune told:—We know persons by sight, or by name, or by description. They are best known by their actions. I. WHAT IS MEANT BY "DOINGS" HERE? 1. The tempers a child indulges in. These tempers are fretful, or patient, or selfish, or generous. 2. The ill habits he forms. Idle, or industrious, or careless, or careful, or dilatory, or prompt. 3. The company he keeps. The choice of companions is a very important thing. II. WHAT MAY BE KNOWN OF A CHILD BY HIS DOINGS? You are making your fortunes now every day. The tempers you are indulging, the habits you are forming, and the company you are keeping are all helping to make them. How careful you should be to find out what is wrong in your tempers and habits, and pray to God to help you to correct it at once. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

A child's doings:—This big world of ours is really made up of a multitude of little ones.

Every living creature has a world of its own. Every child has. So he can be known by what he does. 1. We are not to be judged merely by our sayings. Many people would like to be judged that way. 2. We are not to be judged only by our appearance. 3. We can only be known by our doings. But who is it knows us thus? In this way our fellow-men know us. In this way, above all, God knows us. If we are to be doing always what we ought to do, we shall need a helper. (1) Because of our inclinations to do evil. (2) Because we have so many powerful enemies. Give the story of Telemachus and Mentor, and show that Jesus is our ever-present friend, helper, and guide. (*R. Tuck, B.A.*) *Christian childhood soon discovers itself*:—How do we know a Christian boy or girl? Why in the same way that you know a candle has been lighted—by its shining. Do you suppose that people do not know whether you love your mother or not? You need not say to them, "I am very fond of my mother"; they will find it out soon enough for themselves—by the way you speak of your mother; by the way you speak to your mother; by your obedience to her directions; by your thoughtfulness when you think you can help her; by your willingness to be in her company; by your grief when she is grieved, or in trouble or pain. Yes, in a hundred different ways people can discover your affection for your mother. So with your love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ. But though you need not announce to the world how good you are, the world will find out if you are good, will find out if you love Jesus Christ, when they see that you really—not in pretence, but really—like all that belongs to Him: His book, His house, His day. (*G. Calthrop, M.A.*)

Ver. 12. The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.—Ears and no ears, eyes and no eyes:—1. There are wise men in the world who will not admit that it was God who made the seeing eye, or the hearing ear, or anything else; who will rather assume that the ear and the eye made themselves by a gradual process of development. And you may not be able to withstand their arguments. The text may have an inexpressible value for you. If you can quote against the wise the words of a wiser, you are on firm ground. And the vast majority of the wisest and best men of every age concur with Solomon. 2. There is something in the text suitable for young children. When Solomon spoke of the hearing ear, he meant to remind us that some have ears which do not hear, and eyes that do not see. What we hear in any utterance depends on what we bring the power of hearing, just as what we see in any scene depends on what we bring the power of seeing. We are all apt to overlook that which is unknown to us. What we do not understand, or do not expect, excites no curiosity, touches no interest, rouses no attention; and hence it slips by unseen, unheard—just as the snapping of a slender twig might say nothing to us, and yet might tell a sportsman where the wild creature was which he was trying to shoot down. If God makes the hearing ear and the seeing eye, He expects us to make them too. He expects us to use and train these wonderful faculties. He rewards us in proportion as we meet, or disappoint, His expectation and our duty. 3. When the Bible speaks of deaf men who hear, and blind men who see, it almost always refers to men's moral condition, to their attitude towards truth, righteousness, and God, as well as to the use they make of their mental faculties and capacities. It praises them for seeing and hearing as for an act of virtue and piety; it blames them for not seeing and hearing as for a sin. Knowledge without love is at once a poor and a perilous endowment. To be clever without being good, without even trying to be good, is only to deserve, and to secure, a severer condemnation. You have not even begun to be truly wise until you love and reverence God; until, from reverence and love for Him, you set yourselves to know and do that which is right, however hard it may be, and refuse to do that which is wrong, however easy and pleasant it may look. Men also prize goodness more than knowledge and cleverness, and value a kind heart more than even a full and well-trained mind. Be good, then, if you would be wise, if you would prove that you have an eye that sees and an ear to hear and obey. To be good no doubt is hard work. But that is the very reason why God asks you to trust in Him and to lean on Him. He is good, and He both can and will make you good, if you will let Him. (*S. Cox, D.D.*) *The hearing ear and the seeing eye*:—Why does Solomon say this? 1. THAT GOD SHOULD BE STUDIED IN THESE ORGANS. 1. In them Divine wisdom is manifest. Take—(1) The mechanism of these organs. "The eye, by its admirable combination of coats and humours, and lenses, produces on the retina, or expansion of nerve at the back of the socket or bony cavity in which it is so securely lodged, a distinct

picture of the minutest or largest object; so that, on a space that is less than an inch in diameter, a landscape of miles in extent, with all its variety of scenery is depicted with perfect exactness of relative proportion in all its parts." Nor is the ear less wonderful. It is a complicated mechanism lying wholly within the body, showing only the wider outer porch through which the sound enters. It conveys the sounds through various chambers to the innermost extremities of those nerves which bear the messages to the brain. So delicate is this organ, that it catches the softest whispers and conveys them to the soul, and so strong that it can bear the roll of the loudest thunders into the chamber of its mistress. (2) The adaptation of these organs. How exquisitely suited they are to the offices they have to fulfil! "Conveying the impressions of the outer universe to the spiritual dweller within, we can," says an eminent author, "by attending to the laws of vision and sound, produce something that, in structure and in mechanism or physical effect, bears some analogy to them. But this is not sight; this is not hearing. These imply perception. Oh, this is the highest and deepest wonder of all! The mechanical structure we can trace out and demonstrate. We can show how by the laws of transmission and refraction, the picture is made on the retina of the eye; and how, by the laws of sound, the yielding, tremulous, undulating air affects the tympanum or drum of the ear. But we can get no farther. How it is that the mind receives its perceptions, how it is that it is affected, what is the nature of nervous influence, or of the process by which, through the medium of the nerves and the brain, thought is produced on the mind—of all this we are profoundly ignorant. 2. In them Divine goodness is manifest. 3. In them Divine intelligence is symbolised.

II. THAT GOD SHOULD BE SERVED BY THESE ORGANS. The service for which God intends us to use them is to convey into our understandings His ideas, into our hearts His Spirit; translate the sensations they convey to us into Divine ideas; apply Divine ideas to the formation of our characters. God's ideas should become at once the spring and rule of all our activities. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The hearing ear and seeing eye*:—For all the faculties of a man's body, as well as of his soul, he is entirely indebted to his great Creator. The forgetfulness of the Creator of our bodily faculties is always accompanied by a forgetfulness of our responsibility for the use of them. How far have we turned to the best account those organs of the body which are more immediately connected with the mind, with the immortal spirit, with the state and well-being of the soul? The eye and ear are inlets to the soul. Be anxious to use your faculties while they are mercifully continued. As God made and opened the natural ear for the perception of sound, so does He make and open the spiritual ear for the reception of Divine truth into the heart. The mental ear, as well as the bodily, is liable to be disordered. In a state of spiritual deafness every child of Adam was born. None of us, when we came into the world, had an ear for spiritual things. Every prayer we offer up to God for grace to bless and prosper His preached Word to our souls is an acknowledgment that the hearing ear, the willing and longing and profiting ear, is His own gracious gift. Does He open thine ear? Listen faithfully. Does He open thine eye? Drink in fully the stream of light from heaven's eternal fountain. (*J. Slade, M.A.*) *Hearing and sight*:—Every one hears and sees all day long, so perpetually that we never think about our hearing and our sight, unless we find them fail us. And yet, how wonderful are hearing and sight. How we hear, how we see, no man knows, nor perhaps ever will know. Science can only tell us as yet what happens, what God does; but of how God does it, it can tell us little or nothing; and of why God does it, nothing at all. It is wonderful that our brains should hear through our ears, and see through our eyes; but it is more wonderful still, that they should be able to recollect what they have heard and seen. Most people think much of signs and wonders, but the commonest things are as wonderful, more wonderful, than the uncommon. It is not faith only to see God in what is strange and rare. This is faith, to see God in what is most common and simple; not so much from those strange sights in which God seems to break His laws, as from those common ones in which He fulfils His laws. It is difficult to believe that, because our souls and minds are disorderly; and therefore order does not look to us what it is, the likeness and glory of God. The greatness of God is manifest in that He has ordained laws which must work of themselves, and with which He need never interfere. The universe is continually going right, because God has given it a law which cannot be broken. (*Charles Kingsley, M.A.*) *Living faculties*:—The Lord is willing to be judged by His work. The sculptor can make an ear, the Lord makes the hearing ear. But man has lost his power to

listen. The mischief is that he thinks he is listening, and is deceiving himself. Listening is the act of the soul. The Lord maketh the seeing eye. The artist has made a thousand eyes, but no seeing eye. God did not give such faculties without a purpose. The very quality and capacity of the faculty must have some suggestion. These faculties were given us for education, not for prostitution. Take care how you use the ear and the eye. Has anybody been the better for your hearing or your seeing? Where faculties are given in man or beast or bird, there is a corresponding opportunity for their exercise provided. There are internal, spiritual eyes. The non-use of faculties is a religious crime. As certainly as we have bodily faculties that have meanings, missions, and issues, as there is a balance and relationship between the bodily and the external, so we have what is called a "religious nature." We know the meaning of reason, we know the meaning of faith, we know the meaning of passionate and wordless yearning. What are you going to do with your religious nature? You can starve it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 14. *It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth.*—*Fraud exposed and condemned*:—The man who would be really religious, must be influenced by religion in every part of his conduct, and on all occasions, during the week, as well as on the Sabbath; in his intercourse with man, as well as in his approaches to God. To conduct worldly business in a perfectly fair and upright manner, in such a manner as God prescribes, is a most important and difficult part of true religion. I. SOME GENERAL RULES WHICH GOD HAS GIVEN FOR THE DIRECTION OF THOSE WHO WISH TO KNOW AND DO THEIR DUTY. 1. The rule that requires us to love our neighbour as ourselves. 2. The rule which forbids us to covet any part of our neighbour's possessions. The command is express and comprehensive. We are not forbidden to desire the property of another, on fair and equitable terms. It forbids every desire to increase our property at our neighbour's expense. 3. We are commanded to observe in all our transactions the rules of justice, truth, and sincerity. 4. We are directed in all our transactions to remember that the eye of God is upon us. II. APPLY THESE RULES AND SHOW WHAT THEY REQUIRE, WHAT THEY FORBID, AND WHEN THEY ARE VIOLATED. 1. What do these rules require of us as subjects or members of civil society? There is an implied contract or agreement between a government and its subjects, by which the subjects engage to give a portion of their property in exchange for the blessings of protection, social order, and security. 2. The application of these rules to the common pecuniary transactions of life. They forbid every wish, and much more every attempt, to defraud or deceive our neighbour. And this on the part of both buyer and seller. We must put ourselves in the place of our neighbour, and do as we would be done by. We are always to act as we would do if our fellow-creatures could see our hearts. 3. Apply these rules to our past conduct, that we may ascertain how far we have observed, and in what instances we have disregarded them. God takes special cognisance of the wrongs which are done by artifice, fraud, and deceit, and which human laws cannot prevent or discover. Any who have violated these rules in their pecuniary transactions are required to repent, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. There is no repentance, and of course no forgiveness, without restitution. How can a man repent of iniquity who still retains the wages of iniquity? And these rules must regulate our future transactions if we mean to be the real subjects of Christ. They are the laws of His kingdom, which you have covenanted to obey. (*E. Payson, D.D.*) *Bargain-driving*:—The inconsiderate thirst for cheapness is one of the social curses of our age. Here is a concise description of a bargain-driver. Say anything to depreciate the article, and get it at a lower price than is asked; then boast of your success. This may be sharp, but if it is not always sin, it is constantly on the very margin of vice. In buying cheap we may avail ourselves only of lawful advantages, and may not compass unrighteous or unfair gains. To get what a man wants, and to give as little as possible for it, need not be sinful. Lying is a sin in trade just as much as in common conversation. The inconsiderate craving for cheapness has a bad effect on the mind. It makes it grasping and selfish, greedy of its own gain, but careless of others' well-doing. It produces, if long indulged in, a spirit of low and unworthy cunning. Observe how the influence of this thirst for cheapness spreads. I have no words to express my contempt and abhorrence for the meanness which goes into a shop with the deliberate resolve to get the articles wanted for less than the price asked. Such questions are the very essence of religion. A religion that does not touch our every-day life, our money

matters, our actions in and on society, is a religion that is on the surface merely. It is the undue severance of things secular from things sacred which makes so much of men's religion unreal, and so much of their business unrighteous, *i.e.*, not carried out with a full sense of what is right from man to man. (*J. E. Clarke, M.A.*) *Chicanery*:—Mr. Bridges says "that Augustine mentions a somewhat ludicrous, but significant story. A mountebank published in the full theatre that in the next entertainment he would show to every man present what was in his heart. An immense concourse attended, and the man redeemed his pledge to the vast assembly by a single sentence: '*Vili vultis emere, et caro vendere*' ('You all wish to buy cheap, and to sell dear'), a sentence generally applauded; every one, even the most trifling (as Augustine observes) finding the confirming witness in his own conscience." There is no harm in buying in the cheapest market and selling in the dearest. In fact, this is both wise and right in the vendor. Some regard the word "buyer" here in the sense of possessor, and then the idea of the passage is changed, and it is this—that a man attaches greater value to a thing after he has lost it than before. This is a law of human nature. The lost piece of silver, the lost sheep, the lost son. But it is more like Solomon to regard the text as meaning what it says—the "buyer." We offer two remarks upon the passage. I. That it reveals a COMMON COMMERCIAL PRACTICE. The "buyer" depreciates the commodity in the process of purchase. He does this in order to get it at a price below its worth. And when he succeeds, and it comes legally into his possession, the value of the article is not only properly estimated, but greatly exaggerated. "He boasteth"—1. Because his vanity has been gratified. He feels that he has done a clever thing. "He boasteth"—2. Because his greed has been gratified. II. That it reveals an IMMORAL COMMERCIAL PRACTICE. 1. There is falsehood. 2. There is dishonesty. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Honest buying*:—It was once proposed to the Duke of Wellington to purchase a farm in the neighbourhood of Strathfieldsaye, which lay near to his estate, and was therefore valuable. The Duke assented. When the purchase was completed, his steward congratulated him upon having made such a bargain, as the seller was in difficulties, and forced to part with it. "What do you mean by a bargain?" said the Duke. The other replied, "It was valued at £1,100, and we have got it for £800." "In that case," said the Duke, "you will please to carry the extra £300 to the late owner, and never talk to me of cheap land again." (*Home Words.*)

Ver. 15. **There is gold, and a multitude of rubies.**—*On the moral end of business*:—Let me define my meaning in the use of this phrase—"the moral end of business." It is not the end for which property should be sought. It is not the moral purpose to be answered by the acquisition, but by the process of acquisition. And again, it is not the end of industry in general—that is a more comprehensive subject—but it is the end of business in particular, of barter, of commerce. "The end of business!" some one may say; "why, the end of business is to obtain property; the end of the process of acquisition is acquisition." I hold that the ultimate end of all business is a moral end. I believe that business—I mean not labour, but barter, traffic—would never have existed if there had been no end but sustenance. The animal races obtain subsistence upon an easier and simpler plan; but for man there is a higher end, and that is moral. The broad grounds of this position I find in the obvious designs of Providence, and in the evident adaptation to this moral end of business itself. 1. There is, then, a design for which all things were made and ordained, going beyond the things themselves. To say that things were made, or that the arrangements and relations of things were ordained, for their own sake, is a proposition without meaning. The world, its structure, productions, laws, and events, have no good nor evil in them—none, but as they produce these results in the experience of living creatures. The end, then, of the inanimate creation is the welfare of the living, and, therefore, especially of the intelligent creation. But the welfare of human beings lies essentially in their moral culture. We are not appointed to pass through this life barely that we may live. We are not impelled, both by disposition and necessity, to buy and sell, barely that we may do it; nor to get gain, barely that we may get it. There is an end in business beyond supply. There is an object in the acquisition of wealth beyond success. There is a final cause of human traffic, and that is virtue. With this view of the moral end of business falls in the constant doctrine of all elevated philosophy and true religion. Life, say the expounders of every creed, is a probation. Now, if anything deserves to be considered as a part

of that probation, it is business. Life, say the wise, is a school. But the end of a lesson is that something be learned; and the end of business is, that truth, rectitude, virtue, be learned. This is the ultimate design proposed by Heaven, and it is a design which every wise man, engaged in that calling, will propose to himself. It is no extravagance, therefore, but the simple assertion of a truth, to say to a man so engaged, and to say emphatically, "You have an end to gain beyond success, and that is the moral rectitude of your own mind." 2. That business is so exquisitely adapted to accomplish that purpose, is another argument with me to prove that such, in the intention of its Ordainer, was its design. An honest man, a man who sincerely desires to attain to a lofty and unbending uprightness, could scarcely seek a discipline more perfectly fitted to that end than the discipline of trade. For what is trade? It is the constant adjustment of the claims of different parties, a man's self being one of the parties. This competition of rights and interests might not invade the solitary study, or the separate tasks of the workshop, or the labours of the silent field, once a day; but it presses upon the merchant and trader continually. Do you say that it presses too hard? Then, I reply, must the sense of rectitude be made the stronger to meet the trial. Every plea of this nature is an argument for strenuous moral effort. A man must do more than to attain to punctilious honesty in his actions; he must train his whole soul, his judgment, his sentiments and affections, to uprightness, candour, and good-will. I have thus attempted to show that business has an ultimate, moral end—one going beyond the accumulation of property. 3. This may also be shown to be true, not only on the scale of our private affairs, but on the great theatre of history. Commerce has always been an instrument in the hands of Providence for accomplishing nobler ends than promoting the wealth of nations. It has been the grand civiliser of nations. With its earliest birth on the Mediterranean shore, freedom was born. Phœnicia, the merchants of whose cities, Tyre and Sidon, were accounted princes; the Hebrew commonwealth, which carried on a trade through those parts; the Grecian, Carthaginian, and Roman States, were not only the freest, but they were the only free states of antiquity. In the middle ages commerce broke down in Europe, the feudal system, raising up, in the Hanse Towns, throughout Germany, Sweden, and Norway, a body of men who were able to cope with barons and kings, and to wrest from them their free charters and rightful privileges. In England its influence is proverbial; the sheet-anchor, it has long been considered, of her unequalled prosperity and intelligence. Its moral influences are the only ones of which we stand in any doubt, and these, it need not be said, are of unequalled importance. The philanthropist, the Christian, are all bound to watch these influences with the closest attention, and to do all in their power to guard and elevate them. It is upon this point that I wish especially to insist; but there are one or two topics that may previously claim some attention. (1) If, then, business is a moral dispensation, and its highest end is moral, I shall venture to call in question the commonly supposed desirableness of escaping from it—the idea which prevails with so many of making a fortune in a few years, and afterwards of retiring to a state of leisure. If business really is a scene of worthy employment and of high moral action, I do not see why the moderate pursuit of it should not be laid down in the plan of entire active life; and why, upon this plan, a man should not determine to give only so much time each day to his avocations as would be compatible with such a plan; only so much time, in other words, as will be compatible with the daily enjoyment of life, with reading, society, domestic intercourse, and all the duties of philanthropy and devotion. (2) Another topic is the rage for speculation. I wish to speak of it now in a particular view—as interfering, that is to say, with the moral end of business. It is not looking to diligence and fidelity for a fair reward, but to chance and chance for a fortunate turn. It is drawing away men's minds from the healthful processes of sober industry and attention to business, and leading them to wait in feverish excitement as at the wheel of a lottery. To do business and get gain, honestly and conscientiously, is a good thing. It is useful discipline of the character. I look upon a man who has acquired wealth, in a laudable, conscientious, and generous pursuit of business, not only with a respect far beyond what I can feel for his wealth—for which indeed, abstractly, I can feel none at all—but with the distinct feeling that he has acquired something far more valuable than opulence. But for this discipline of the character, for the reasonableness and rectitude of mind which a regular business intercourse may form, speculation furnishes but a narrow field, if any at all; such speculation, I mean, as has lately created a popular frenzy in this

country about the sudden acquisition of property. This insane passion for accumulation, ever ready, when circumstances favour, to seize upon the public mind, is that "love of money which is the root of all evil," that "covetousness which is idolatry." It springs from an undue, an idolatrous estimate of the value of property. Many are feeling that nothing—nothing will do for them or for their children but wealth; not a good character, not well-trained and well-exerted faculties, not virtue, not the hope of heaven—nothing but wealth. It is their god, and the god of their families. (*O. Dewey, D.D.*) **The lips of knowledge are a precious jewel.**—*The use of the tongue:*—It is very difficult to control the noble faculty of speech, but it may be controlled. You may bridle it. I. THE POWER OF SPEECH IS A GREAT ENDOWMENT. One of the essential distinctions between us and the mere animal. Expression is thus given to our power of thinking, which is another great endowment. The tongue is the heart's interpreter. Used as it may and ought to be, its influence is luminous as the light and fragrant as the rose. But what mischief it may work! II. WE HAVE GREAT RESPONSIBILITY IN THE MATTER OF OUR SPEAKING. All our endowments involve an accountability proportionate to their magnitude and importance, and speech is no exception. The impression seems common that our words are of little importance, and that while actions must be accounted for, speaking is but a voice, and will not be recorded, or appear again to confront us. Every serious person must be sensible how heavily the burden of sins of speech presses on him. III. GOD HAS AFFORDED FULLNESS OF INSTRUCTION IN REGARD TO OUR BEARING OF THIS RESPONSIBILITY. The instruction is, for the most part, general in its nature. 1. Truth. Departure from truth is specially condemned. Untruth includes exaggerated statements. 2. Sincerity. Heart and lips must never be at variance. 3. Purity. This excludes levity in speaking of holy things. 4. Love. This will induce to active good. IV. SPEECH IS CAPABLE OF CONTROL. How is it to be bridled? 1. By right thinking. 2. By watchfulness. 3. By correct habits. 4. By prayer. "He that seemeth to be religious and bridleth not his tongue, that man's religion is vain." (*H. Wilkes, D.D.*)

Ver. 18. **Every purpose is established by counsel.**—*Counsel:*—"Of all apostolic habits the most habitual," writes Archbishop Benson, "was the usage of counsel. The upper chamber, the house, the home of Mary, Jerusalem, Antioch, the school of Ephesus, the Hired House at Rome, were so many *conciliabula* and scenes of high debate. How full is the Acts of the Apostles of mentions of 'disputation,' 'conference,' 'reasoning,' and of such expressions as these: 'They came together to consider the matter,' 'It pleased the apostles and elders and the whole Church,' 'Being assembled together with one accord,' and the like. How strong are the injunctions 'to assemble themselves,' 'to come together in the assembly,' 'to be gathered together with one spirit'!" 1. It is a familiar experience that we can tune ourselves for any work of our own by placing ourselves in touch with some kindred work by a master hand. By this simple method we can in some measure "kindle when we will the fire which in the heart resides." Our spirits drink in refreshment from those living fountains of inspiration. What others have consummately done lends us at least the impulse to go and do likewise. 2. By withdrawing ourselves, if only for a brief space, from the absorbing interests, the keen controversies, of the present into the serenest regions of the past, where principles and men and methods can be more impartially studied, by going "back to the Bible" in the modest but unflinching spirit, and with the enriched equipment of scientific research—our minds are tranquillised and balanced as well as quickened and enlightened for dealing with the urgent needs, the burning questions, the conflicting points of view and policies of the hour. So by God's help may it be with us as we rapidly survey "the type and model" of Christian councils of every kind and degree, and thus look for guiding principles, practical indications, and spiritual tone to "the rock whence we are hewn." (*Bp. Jayne, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. **Meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.**—*On keeping away people we don't want:*—Not all insects are welcome visitors to plants; there are unbidden guests who do harm. To their visits there are often obstacles. Stiff hairs, impassably slippery or viscid stems, moats in which the intruders drown, and other structural peculiarities, whose origin may have had no reference to insects, often justify themselves by saving the plant. Even more interesting, however, is the preservation of some acacias and other shrubs by a bodyguard of ants, which, innocent

themselves, ward off the attacks of the deadly leaf-cutters. In some cases the bodyguard has become almost hereditarily accustomed to the plants, and the plants to them, for they are found in constant companionship, and the plants exhibit structures which look almost as if they had been made as shelters for the ants. On some of our European trees similar little homes or *domatia* constantly occur, and shelter small insects, which do no harm to the trees, but cleanse them from injurious fungi. (*J. Arthur Thomson, M.A.*)

Ver. 21. **An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.**—*Patience and permanence*:—Ours is an age of haste. Short cuts to learning, professional life without due preparation, fortunes before labour; all this foretells disaster and collapse. In behalf of an energy that is persistent, a labour that is patient, enterprises that count the cost I wish to speak. The truth of the text appears—I. **IN THE MATERIAL WORLD.** Tremendous forces have operated through ages to bring the earth into its present condition. Geological, chemical, astronomical science tell of changes slow, silent, but persistent, and therefore permanent. II. **IN THE INTELLECTUAL WORLD.** The human mind has a physical basis. As grew the material, so grows the mental world. A process here, a progress there. Ideas endure hardness in their battle for recognition. Doctrines are developed according to this law of progress. Scripture unfolds like herbage in the field. Intellectual power is secured by labour and persistent effort. Nature reveals her secrets, history discloses the past, revelation makes known her truth, only to the studious and devout. III. **IN THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.** Scripture has styled the Almighty “the God of all patience.” His works bear evidence of finish and completeness. Why does He deliberate, tarry, and hasten not? Let this God of patience interpret His own plans. With Him millenniums are as days. Sudden movements in grace, as in nature, are of the destructive kind. Gentle dews, not crashing storms, make good pasture. A lamb, not the lion, is final conqueror, and the servant who sows and waits, prays and persists, believes and does not make haste, shall have a sure reward. (*Frank Rector, M.A.*)

Ver. 23. **And a false balance is not good.**—*False balance applied to providences*:—We may apply a false balance to the providences which make up our life. What skill some people have in dealing only in dark things, black aspects, wintry phases, deprivations, bereavements, losses! They are eloquent when they tell you what they have parted with. Who can be equally eloquent in numbering mercies? Who ever gets beyond the outside of things, the mere rim, the palpable environment? Who gets into the soul, and who says, “I have reason, how can I be poor? I have health, how can I fail? I have home, how can I be desolate?” In balancing life take in all these reasons and thoughts and considerations, and so doing you will see that all the while God has been making you rich, or giving you the possibility and opportunity of acquiring and enjoying the true wealth. Who is there that keeps a right balance when he has to weigh the present and the future? The unsteady hand can never get an equipoise; the palsied fingers cannot hold the scales. The present is here, the future is yonder; and when did “here” fail to carry the war against “yonder”? We have even formed little foolish proverbs about this; we have gone so far as to tell the lie that “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.” Whoever says that is guilty of a palpable sophism. He seems to be speaking truth, he forgets that everything depends on the bird that is in the bush, and all the possibilities and contingencies and promises which relate to the possibility and certainty of its capture if the right way be pursued. We are the victims of the present. It would seem impossible for some men to do justice to spirituality. Spiritual teaching goes for nothing. If you deal in clothing for the head you will get your money; there is a county court to support you—but if you give a man ideas, if you pray him into heaven, if you lift up his soul into a new selfhood, the county court would smile at you if you made application for assistance in any direction that you might think honest and equitable. And the very best of men play at that game. They cannot help it. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 24. **Man's goings are of the Lord: how can a man then understand his own way?**—*Man's goings*:—I. **THE TEXT IN ITS NEGATIVE BEARINGS.** 1. Appeal to Scripture (chap. xvi. 9; Jer. x. 23). 2. Appeal to history. Hazael (2 Kings viii. 11). 3. Appeal to your own experience. Is it not true that when you trust to your own strength you are apt to trifle with temptation? II. **THE TEXT IN ITS POSITIVE**

BEARINGS. "Man's goings are of the Lord." His goings in the path of duty are. What is true of duty is true also of the conduct of life. From this gather encouragement, and nourish humility. Check all presumptuous schemes as to the future. (*A. Nicholson, B.A.*)

Ver. 25. It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy.—*Selfishness in religion*:—There were under the Levitical dispensation certain things prescribed by the law as consecrated to God; such as tithes, first-fruits, firstlings of the herds and the flock. There were also things that were voluntarily consecrated as free-will offerings to Jehovah. It is to these, perhaps, that Solomon here specially refers. The expression, "to devour that which is holy," characterises the conduct of those who appropriate that to their own use which had been either by themselves or others consecrated to the service of God. The subject leads us to consider selfishness in religion. Selfishness everywhere is bad, but when selfishness intrudes into the temple of religion, it is peculiarly hideous. It is then the serpent amongst seraphs. I. **THE APPROPRIATING OF THE CONSECRATED TO PERSONAL USE.** The text speaks of the man who "devoureth that which is holy." This was the sin of Achan: he robbed the treasury of the Lord (*Josh. vi. 19, vii. 1*). "Will a man rob God?" (*Mal. iii. 8, 9*). This is done now in England. 1. In the personal appropriations of ecclesiastical endowments. 2. In the assumption of sacred offices for personal ends. 3. In the adoption of the Christian profession from motives of personal interest. II. **THE ENDEAVOURING TO AVOID THE FULFILMENT OF RELIGIOUS VOWS.** "And after vows to make inquiry." There are three ideas that must not be attached to this expression. 1. The idea that it is wrong to make religious vows is not here. 2. The idea that it is wrong to break improper vows is not here. 3. The idea that it is wrong to think upon the vow after it is made is not here. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 26. A wise king scattereth the wicked, and bringeth the wheel over them.—*Persecution and righteous penalty*:—A passage of this kind may easily be perverted by being used for the purpose of supporting a doctrine of persecution. To bring the wheel over a man seems to be a figurative expression for the very direst cruelty. If a man is wicked, crush him with the wheel, tear him limb from limb, decapitate him, in some way show that there is a power that can terminate not only his enjoyment and his liberty, but his life. That, however is not the meaning of the text. Always distinguish between persecution and righteous penalty, between mere oppression and the assertion of that righteousness which is essential to the consolidation of society. When the stacks of corn were spread upon the threshing-floor, the grain was separated from the husk by a sort of sledge or cart which was driven over them. The process was for the purpose of separating the chaff from the wheat; the process therefore was purely beneficent: so with the wise king; he winnows out evil persons, he signalises them, he gives them all the definiteness of a separate position, and by bringing them into startling contrast with persons of sound and honest heart he seeks to put an end to their mischievous power. Indiscrimination is the ruin of goodness. Men are separated by different ways, not by imprisonment, not by merely personal penalty, not by stigma and brand of an offensive character; they are separated by contrariety of taste, aspiration, feeling, sympathy; in proportion as the good are earnest do they classify themselves, bringing themselves in sacred association with one another, and by sensitiveness of moral touch they feel the evil and avoid it; they know the evil person at a distance and are careful to put themselves out of his way and reach. What is represented as being done by the wise king is done by the cultivation of high principle and Christian honour. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 27 The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord.—*The nature and function of conscience*:—The spirit of man is the breath of the Creator. The breath kindled intelligence in the brain, and infused vitality into the heart. It did more than that. It made man a moral being, capable of virtue, and responsible for his actions. The vitalizing breath of the Lord kindled a light in man—here called "the candle of the Lord." By that candle man sees his own inner nature, witnesses the process of his own mind, and observes the motions of his affections and will. Conscience has a place of pre-eminent importance in our nature. 1. Scientific men give one definition of conscience, while popular usage sanctions another materially different. In every-day usage the word is used to indicate the

whole moral nature of man. When a man resists temptation he says, "My conscience will not let me do it." Conscience includes three things: the perception of right or wrong; the judgment of a particular action as being right or wrong; the feeling of pleasure or remorse which follows right or wrong action. The Bible usage of the word is the same as our ordinary usage in every-day speech. In Scripture usage, conscience includes the perception, the judgment, and the feeling. Conscience is not an Old Testament term. And, singularly enough, the word was never used in the teaching of the Lord Jesus. 2. Paul's most frequent word for the function of conscience is the figurative word "witness." Conscience is a witness testifying in the soul. A witness is one who testifies, one who tells clearly what he knows of a matter. To what facts or truths does conscience bear testimony. It testifies to the existence of a fundamental distinction between right and wrong. It testifies that right ought to be done, and that wrong ought not to be done. It convicts a man when wrong has been done. Its witness becomes a check on man's doings. (*Jesse T. Whitley.*) *The spiritual part of man:*—The text is an account of the soul, or spiritual part in man. The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah, *i.e.*, its operations and manner of performing them are similar to those of a lamp, and it is supported in them by Jehovah spiritually, as a lamp is in nature physically. In a lamp are four things. 1. A vessel. 2. A substance capable of being illuminated. 3. Necessity for kindling it. 4. Constant recruits of oil to supply it and keep it burning. These particulars are as spiritually true in the soul of man. I. THE SOUL HAS A VESSEL IN WHICH IT IS ENCLOSED AND CONTAINED. The body is the vessel of this lamp of Jehovah. II. THE SOUL, THOUGH CAPABLE OF RECEIVING ILLUMINATION FROM GOD, IS IN ITSELF ABSOLUTELY DARK. When, by that grand and original sin at the fall, the light that was in us became darkness, how great was that darkness! By the fall this most glorious excellency and perfection of our nature, spiritual discernment by faith, was lost, and we became like the beasts. III. CHRIST WAS SENT TO KINDLE A LIGHT IN THE SOUL. "A light to lighten the Gentiles." "The true light that lighteth (the lamp of) every one coming into the world." When the light of Jehovah is lighted in the soul of man, and not overwhelmed by sensuality, it conquers and triumphs over the natural darkness that is in us. When the Divine light is the agent in the soul, the moment it meets with any darkness to impede and obstruct its operations it at once recoils, and by that means admonishes us of it; after which it never rests till it has either expelled it or conformed it to itself. IV. SPIRITUAL OIL IS NECESSARY TO KEEP THE LIGHT ALIVE IN OUR HEARTS. The Holy Spirit is the Divine oil that must feed and nourish our lamps. Inferences for our direction in faith and practice: 1. If the body is a vessel to contain the heavenly lamp, how few are seeking to "possess this vessel in sanctification and honour." 2. If the soul be dark by nature, what becomes of that idol of the deists, the "light of nature"? 3. If Christ be the only person that can lighten our darkness, to Him let every man go. 4. Let us not make the fatal mistake of setting out to meet the Bridegroom, without taking oil in our vessels, with our lamps. (*Bp. Horne.*) *The nerve of religious sensation:*—Able to shine; constructed to shine; but not alight until it has been lighted—the candle of the Lord. Man's spirit is part of us, and able to produce flame when it has been touched with flame. It is a special capacity we have for feeling, appreciating, and responding to Divine things. Sound affects the ear; light the eye; the spirit is the nerve of religious sensation. Man is a bundle of adaptations. The religious sense is the faculty which all men have, in varying degree, of appreciating religious and Divine things. We could not be holy without the instinct, but the instinct does not insure our being holy. There is in this no difference between the religious instinct and other of our instincts. The religious sense forms part of each man's original outfit. It gives the teacher and preacher something with which to start. The facility with which children can be approached in religious matters shows that religion is a matter of instinct before it is a matter of education. This inborn religious sense is an easy argument for the existence of God. The possession of this religious instinct puts us upon the track of a very simple and practical duty. Whether we become holy or not will depend mostly upon how we treat that instinct, and upon whether we repress and smother it, or give it free chance of unfolding. It rests with us to take some sturdy measures to bring out this religious consciousness into greater force and fuller glow. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*) *The spirit of man:*—When God had completed the house of the soul, He furnished it most liberally with glorious lights. The intellect is one of the bright lights placed in the soul's house to cheer and

guide men in this life. The light of the human mind is invaluable. Man is scarcely a man without its illuminating flame. Then there is the guiding light of conscience. And there is the spiritual light which characterises all mankind, that leads humanity everywhere to worship God. I. MAN IS A GREAT BEING. It is said alone of man, "In the image of God created He him." This singles out man as the greatest being on earth. Every earnest, intelligent, and devout man is in some degree conscious of an inherent greatness. Conscious personality is a unique power. In the moral realm every man is a sovereign who conceives plans and executes purposes of high significance and far-reaching consequences. Man's conscious personality survives the shock of death. Man is the son of God. The sons of God are partakers of the Divine nature. This raises them to a plane that is at an infinite distance from the creatures next to them in the scale of existence. Really true greatness consists in likeness to God. A good man is one of the greatest works of God. II. MAN IS DIVINELY ILLUMINATED. 1. The intellectual light of man is from God. 2. The light of conscience is from God. It is a pure, clear flame, that reveals to us the character of our thoughts and purposes before they become actions. 3. The spiritual light in man is from God. Savage and civilised, the world over, worship some god. The lamp that lights all men who come into the world, and leads them to worship, is doubtless of God's kindling. In worship, the soul pays its filial homage to God. III. MAN HAS BEEN ILLUMINATED FOR A DIVINE PURPOSE. God created all things for His own glory. Men of great intellectual powers are placed by God in the midst of the world's moral darkness, that by their superior light they might scatter the mental night of their fellows. Great intellects possess a tremendous power for good or evil. "Man is like the candle lighted by the Spirit of God, radiating the glory of God's nature, and itself glorified by the Divine fire. But some men are unlighted candles." (*D. Rhys Jenkins.*) *The light of conscience*:—Victor Hugo says: "In every human heart there is a light kindled and, close by, a strong wind which seeks to extinguish it; this light is conscience, this wind is superstition. Conscience is the child of God; superstition, the child of the devil. Conscience loves and rejoices in the light; superstition hates the light of mind and spirit, because its deeds are evil."

Ver. 29. *The glory of young men is their strength.*—*The glory of young men*:—Power, force, might, strength, are diverse names for a thing which always has been, and always will be, admirable in human esteem. In all its forms it is a glorious thing. The man of indomitable will is always an object of reverence to his fellows. In every region of the humanities the man who can do the most, and with the least apparent expenditure of power, acquires a kind of moral chieftainship among his compeers in the same sphere. The text says that strength is the peculiar glory of young men. Other things will come by and by, but this is the thing that comes first. The glory of young men is not their wisdom. Young men are not generally very wise. They make a good many mistakes. The time for wisdom will come, whether the wisdom will come or not. The strength that is to be their glory is physical, bodily strength. A vast multitude of soul-ills come of a much lower kind of ill. Some men are born weak. And it is a very terrible thing, though a very merciful thing for the world. It is God's law for preventing the perpetuation of moral evil. It is a provision that depraved lives of humanity shall die out if they do not, by conforming to the Divine laws, repair and improve themselves. There are some young men who are shorn of their glory, and have nobody to blame but themselves. What caricatures of humanity one sometimes passes in the street, in the form of young men! And there are old young men, enervated by folly and wickedness, doomed to drag out a weary existence for a few years, with no proper force for any of life's duties and relations, and self-doomed. Keep, I beseech you, by all the means in your power, a strong, healthy body—vigorous, athletic, nervous, firm. But the text means more than this. Body is not yet manhood. There is moral power. One wants a deal of moral force, especially at life's beginning, to live a true, and worthy, and noble life. Force is of two sorts: there is quiet force-inertia, and there is active force-motion. Both of these sorts of force go to make manhood. You must try to get moral solidity, gravity, weight, firmness, immovability, steadfastness. The elements of this force are conviction and decision. You must try to get active force, enthusiasm, energy, enterprise. Without this, nothing is done in any department of life. Seek the ability to go out of yourselves, to do and to dare for God. (*G. W. Conder.*) *The glory of young men*:—Men look with admiration and with awe upon great power, wherever it is seen. The

visitor to Niagara cannot but be moved by the thought of the immeasurable power of that river as it dashes over the declivity. The man of power has always been the object of the veneration of his less talented fellow-men. He has but to move and straightway his movements are chronicled all over the civilised world. There is no sight in all the earth so impressive as is that of young manhood in its youthful power and vigour of faculty, eager for the struggle of life. I. THE STRENGTH OF YOUNG MANHOOD SHOULD BE CONTROLLED. Power is productive of good only when its energies are guided in right channels and directed to right uses by intelligence and wisdom. When power becomes master and goes out from beneath the hand of wise control it is always destructive. The locomotive, Titan giant serving men meekly so long as they hold its movements obedient to their will, goes crashing into the train ahead, because the engineer has lost control of his iron steed; and the shrieks of the wounded and the moans of the dying tell us of the awful death-dealing ability of great power which has become a law to itself. The waters behind the dam at South Fork were harmless, except potentially, so long as they were controlled. They served only to further the peaceful industries of the mountain valley. But, breaking the bonds and acknowledging no ruler but anarchy, they spread desolation in their wake. Powerful though machinery and the forces of nature are, they are pigmies in comparison with a young man. He has done more than they all. What the world is to-day it has been made by young men. "Through all time, the greatest victories have been achieved, the wisest and most beneficent reforms instituted, the greatest Christian enterprises undertaken, and the most decided impetus given to the advance of the world by men who have "begun to be about thirty years of age." Bichat, French physician and physiologist, had revolutionised the practice of medicine and died before he was thirty-one. John Wesley founded the Methodist Church before he was thirty-six. Luther was thirty-three when he nailed his theses to the door of Wittenberg Church. Wilberforce had compelled England to free all her slaves by the time he was thirty-two. At the same age Watt had invented the steam-engine. But on the other hand the destructive influence of the strength of young manhood, when that strength is not wisely controlled, is seen when we glance at the rotors of our jails and penal institutions and discover the fact that the inmates of those institutions are for the most part young men. History also reminds us that Alexander the Great had made his name odious, conqueror of the world though he was, by the time he was thirty-three, and Napoleon had come to ignominy by the time he was thirty-four.

II. BUT THIS STRENGTH OF YOUNG MANHOOD SHOULD ALSO BE CONSERVED. One of the most difficult things to impress upon young men is the fact they will not always be overflowing, as they are in their teens and twenties, with strength and spirits. When God makes a man, He puts into him a certain amount of life-force. When that is consumed, there is no way in which it may be replaced. Ruskin overtaxed himself in his younger days, with the result that the lamp of his genius burned but dimly in later life. Walter Scott did the same, and suffered the same fate. Scientists tell us that there is no reason why a man should not live past the century mark in years, if he be well born and if he conserve his strength. It lies within the power of every well-born man so to use the strength which nature has given him that, as the psalmist says, "in old age he shall be fat and flourishing." III. THIS STRENGTH OF YOUNG MEN SHOULD ALSO BE CONCENTRATED. "This one thing I do." Success in life depends upon concentration of one's energies upon one thing. Paul was a successful preacher because he was "determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The sun casts a genial warmth over a large area, but if we wish to light a fire by it we must take the sun-glass and concentrate its rays upon one point. IV. THIS POWER SHOULD ALSO BE CONSECRATED. This is the capstone and the keystone of all that we have thus far pointed out. "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The subordination of every power and faculty to the law contained in the great commandment will in itself lead to the control, the conservation, and the concentration of power and faculty. (R. S. Young.) *The glory of young men* :—Man has a threefold nature—physical, mental, and spiritual; body, brain, and soul. Therefore there are three kinds of strength—physical, intellectual, spiritual. There is a close connection between health and virtue. "Before any vice can fasten on a man, his physical nature must be debilitated." The conditions of health are—1. We must learn the laws of our physical well-being. 2. We must act and live up to these laws. The laws of health are—pure air, suitable food, and sufficient exercise. You have a healthy craving for innocent recreation. Do not repress it. It is God-implanted, and therefore sacred, sacred

as are any of the other Divine instincts within you. You have a many-sided nature, and every side must have a fair chance of development. Intellectual strength. The mind is the measure of the man; it is the empire or kingdom of the soul. The thinker is the acknowledged king of men. A trained mind, developed by reading and reflection, is worth striving for. Moral and spiritual strength. A clever man is greater than a merely strong man, but a good man is greater than either. Moral and spiritual gains are the most enduring. (*David Watson.*) *The glory of youth and the beauty of age*.—I. GODLINESS MAKES THE STRENGTH OF YOUNG MEN GLORIOUS. 1. Because that strength is governed by a glorious inspiration. 2. Because it is directed to glorious ends. 3. Because it endows him with a glorious steadfastness of principle, an unswerving attachment to the right. 4. Because of the glorious reward he will finally attain. II. GODLINESS MAKES THE HOARY HEADS OF AGE BEAUTIFUL. 1. Godly age is beautiful, because of its wealth of experience. 2. Because it is connected with maturity of Christian character. 3. Because of the connection with a holy peace and brightening hope. III. THE BEAUTY OF THE GREY HEAD IS THE NATURAL AND FITTING RESULT OF THE DEVELOPED GLORY OF YOUTHFUL STRENGTH. Pious strength in the earlier half of life is the seed that ripens into the glad harvest of hopeful, resting readiness which should mark the end. 1. Youthful godliness is likely to secure the beauty of age, because godly principles and practices are best calculated to lengthen life. 2. Because the conduct of youth gives character to age. (*Jackson Wray.*) *The glory of young men*.—1. Ideals of manhood have differed with every age. Physical strength was the primary glory of the race. Samson among the Hebrews, Hector among the Trojans, Achilles among the Greeks, and Richard the Lion-hearted among the Crusaders, were as valuable as batteries or battalions now are. Until Christian civilisation changed it, the measure of the man was his muscle, and his passport to respect was his fighting weight. But we live in a different era. Gunpowder and dynamite have abolished physical differences and put all men on a common level. It is not brawn but brain which tell in this age. Christianity has subordinated the material to the mental. "There is nothing great in the world but man; there is nothing great in man but mind." 2. But there are two kinds of mental strength—a lower and a higher order, the intellectual and the spiritual. There is something better than a clear, cold intellectuality. Man has a heart as well as a head, emotions as well as thoughts. Some of the most atrocious characters in history were men of giant intellect. The Duke of Alva was accomplished and scholarly. As mental strength is higher in rank than the physical, so moral strength is higher than the merely mental. The most valuable possession in this world for a young man is strength of character. With it poverty, obscurity, and ill-health are not misfortunes. Without it wealth, fame, and physical endurance are not blessings. But how little this is appreciated by youth. 3. Every boy longs to be a man. It is a legitimate ambition. But does he know manhood's perils? The moral innocence of childhood grown into manhood is a thousandfold stronger than reformed manhood, built out of the fragments which were gathered up from the wreck and ruin of the former self. 4. The great arena for the development of moral strength is in conquering one's self. 5. But how shall this hardest of victories be won—the victory of self? Remember Constantine's vision. So with you. By the Cross of Christ thou shalt conquer. The testimony of the unrighteous to the worth of religion as a moral armour is an exceedingly valuable testimony. (*J. C. Jackson, D.D.*) *Muscular Christianity*.—I. PHYSICAL STRENGTH. We are prone to glorify and exalt the man of strong intellect at the expense of the muscular man. We are apt to despise physical strength, and look upon it as something very necessary in an ox or horse, but nothing for a Christian to be proud of. The development of physical strength lies very much with ourselves. Physical development is related to mental and moral culture as the foundation to the superstructure which rests upon it. The best students carry their physical and mental training along together. Nor should we lose sight of the influence of physical training upon the morals of the young. Muscular Christianity is the kind of religion that will live, and make itself felt in the world. Mawkish sentimentality is not religion. But if our strength is to be a glory to us it must be consecrated strength. There are those who value their strength, not for the amount of good they can accomplish with it, but for the amount of supposed pleasure or vice their strength enables them to indulge in. Such strength is no glory to young men. II. MENTAL STRENGTH. No college can confer brains where nature has withheld them; and yet it is true that, as regards intellectual power, we are very much what

we make ourselves. It is not those endowed naturally with great talents who rule in the political, social, and religious world. It is those of medium talents, men of activity, diligence, and earnestness, who go up to the top of the ladder—those who deposit their mental capital, such as it is, where it will give the highest interest. Hard work kills very few. The men who live longest are those who combine severe mental labour with proper physical exercise. III. MORAL STRENGTH. If a man lack moral strength, he is no giant, but a mere pigmy, in so far as usefulness in the world is concerned. Moral strength consists—1. In the courage to do the right. 2. To feel our own weakness. 3. Another element in moral strength is a godly life. A consistent man is a tower of strength. He is a resistless power for good. The godly lives of humble, consistent Christians are the most powerful sermons. (*Richmond Logan, M.A.*) *The beauty of age*:—Spring has its charms, peculiar to itself, and so has summer, and so has autumn—each unlike the other, but the last by no means inferior to the others. There is a beauty peculiar to youth, and a beauty that belongs to manhood; is there not a beauty which belongs to age, unlike youth, unlike middle life, but something analogous to the glory of the autumnal foliage? Sometimes we see it. At other times, disease, overwork, trouble, sorrow, are a blight whose wasting has destroyed all beauty. But an old age, a late afternoon, that has escaped this, why should it not be like an autumn afternoon, bright and beautiful? Would it be an improvement to change the turning leaves into fresh green again? Would you rob us of the autumnal beauty, and take the later glory from the hillsides? It is most uncomely in man or woman, when old, to affect youthfulness—in dress and manner, and association, to go back to early life—to endeavour in this to be what one is not. The attempt is always a failure. This is a wheel that can never be turned backward. On the other hand, it is painful to see age anticipated, a premature age affected and taken on. Let the days linger, if they will. Let the leaves continue green, if they may. But there is a beauty, a bloom, a joyousness belonging to the maturity and ripeness of full age. Beauty is not unbecoming age. Bloom is not unbecoming age, neither is joyousness then unbecoming. But let it be itself such as befits age and belongs to it. Let it be the royal purple, running into the dun brown, unlike the verdure of the spring time—its own type of beauty—such as comes only when the sun runs low. In some localities, as the late autumn days are frosty and crisp, you may find by the wayside a flower, there opening its cluster of blossoms in full beauty, in the clear autumn air seeming to have caught the hue of the sky—a pure cerulean blue—the fringed gentian. Why does it blossom so late, with its heavenly hue, unless it be to remind us that there are flowers peculiar to the late autumn of life, and that they should be the evident reflection of heaven? Age may be beautiful with its own adornments. We dwell the longer on this because it is due to age, and because we would dissuade from that mistake, into which some fall, of anticipating and magnifying the sadder aspects of advanced life. As you grow old, be cheerful, if you may. Keep the affections of the heart fresh and warm. If your leaf must fall, forbid it not, while still it hangs, to redden and disport its beauty. If possible, let your sky be open as the sun goes down. (*Alfred E. Ives.*)

CHAPTER XXI.

VER. 1. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.—God and the human race*:—In these verses we have God unfolded to us.—I. AS THE CONTROLLER OF HUMAN HEARTS. Some suppose there is an allusion to the gardener directing the rills of water through the different parts of his ground, and that the comparison is between the ease with which the gardener does this and the ease with which the Almighty controls the purposes and volitions of the human soul. 1. This is an undoubted fact. *A priori* reasoning renders this obvious. The God of infinite wisdom must have a purpose to answer in relation to the existence and history of the human race. He has a purpose not only in the rise and fall of empires, but in all the events that happen in the individual history of the obscure as well as the illustrious. But unless He has a control over the workings of the human heart and the volitions of the human soul, how could this purpose be realised? If He controls not the thoughts and impulses of the human mind, He has no control over the human race, and His purposes have no guarantee for their fulfilment. 2. This fact

interferes not with human responsibility. Though the Creator has an absolute control over all the workings of our minds, yet we are conscious that we are free in all our volitions and actions. Though the reconciliation of these two facts transcends our philosophy, they involve no absurdity. II. AS THE JUDGE OF HUMAN CHARACTER. There is a connection between the second and first verses. The connection suggests—1. That God judges men's characters, not according to their own estimate. Men generally are so vain that they form a high opinion of themselves, but this estimate may be the very reverse of God's. 2. That God judges men's characters not according to the result of their conduct. Though they may unwittingly work out His plans, they do not approve themselves to Him on that account. 3. That God judges men's characters by the heart. The essence of the character is in the motive. III. AS THE APPROVER OF HUMAN GOODNESS (ver. 3). Sacrifice, at best, is only circumstantially good—rectitude is essentially so. Sacrifice, at best, is only the means and expression of good—rectitude is goodness itself. God accepts the moral without the ceremonial, but never the ceremonial without the moral. The universe can do without the ceremonial, but not without the moral. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *God rules the hearts of men*:—General Gordon had an Arab text inscribed over his throne in the Palace of Khartoum—"God rules over the hearts of men."

Ver. 3. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice.—*Ceremonial and moral duties*:—This text is a complete and independent sentence. Confirm the proposition deduced from the text—I. FROM OTHER PLACES OF SCRIPTURE. We find God rejecting and abhorring sacrifices if they were not accompanied with a real repentance and inward sincerity of mind, and the outward works of mercy and justice (ver. 27; Micah vi. 6, 7; Isa. i. 11). II. FROM THE DIFFERENT NATURE OF THESE TWO DUTIES, AND THE DIFFERENT GROUNDS FROM WHENCE ARISING OUR OBLIGATION TO THEM. Sacrifice was grounded upon a positive precept and institution, but justice has its foundation in the nature of God. If we consult merely natural light, we shall discover no necessary foundations in that for sacrifices. As the notion of God includes in it all possible and conceivable perfection, we discern justice to be one of His most essential attributes. III. FROM THE DIFFERENT ENDS OF THESE TWO DUTIES. Sacrifice was not enjoined for its own sake, but justice always was, and is, and ever will be. Sacrifices were ordained to be types of Christ, who was to be offered up in the fulness of time upon the Cross. Sacrifices were enjoined to be as a guard and security for other duties, to be as a hedge and a fence for the moral precepts, and especially to defend the Jews against idolatry. Evidently the goodness of this duty of sacrifice was not natural and intrinsic, but relative and external. But justice was, and is, and ever will be, enjoined for its own sake. It has a natural goodness and beauty in it which, at all times, and in all ages, recommends it to the practice of mankind. Justice is a duty that ariseth from the moral frame and constitution of our souls, and we must offer violence to ourselves, if we be not just to others. IV. FROM THE DIFFERENT EFFECTS OF THESE TWO DUTIES. The effect of sacrifices was the expiation of legal guilt. For deeper guilt no sacrifices were appointed. It is otherwise in the distribution of justice. An impartial execution of that in magistrates and judges does not only put a stop to the growth and increase of sin, but it also appeaseth the wrath and disarms the severity of God. (*William Stainforth, M.A.*)

Ver. 5. The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness.—*Diligence*:—Diligence, while it is opposed to laziness, is opposed also to rashness—to premature and inconsiderate haste. The diligent man first plans and then acts. He proceeds thoughtfully and systematically. Diligence can effect little, unless accompanied with careful forethought. Diligence means steady perseverance in execution. The projects of the attentive, plodding, persevering man, who begins in earnest and goes on to the end in earnest, prepared for difficulties, are those that promise to produce, and generally do produce, a favourable result. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Vers. 6, 7. The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity.—*Dishonesty*:—I. THE EVIL OF DISHONESTY. 1. A breach of the law of God. 2. An invasion of the Divine right of property. 3. An encouragement to indolence. The workshop is one of the finest fields for human development. 4. A certain development of selfishness. 5. A weapon for the destruction of mutual confidence. Men cannot trust those who are watching for opportunities to defraud them. 6. An incentive

to other sins (Jer. vii. 8; John xii. 6; Matt. xxvi. 15). II. THE REMEDY FOR DISHONESTY. 1. A renewed nature. The Spirit of truth dwelling in a man will make war against all dishonesty. 2. A sensitive conscience. Petty pilfering will deaden conscience with respect to this and all other sins (1 Tim. iv. 2). 3. A realisation of the dignity of labour. 4. A due estimate of the value of human possessions. 5. A consciousness of the Divine presence and oversight. 6. A remembrance of the damaging nature of property dishonestly acquired (ver. 7). An act of theft often destroys self-respect, peace of mind, bodily health, and the soul itself. (*H. Thorne.*)

Ver. 8. The way of man is froward and strange; but as for the pure, his work is right.—*Pure*.—I. THE NATURE OF THE MAN OF GOD. It is pure. It is a grand thing to be clean in character. Take care that your words are clean. The very looks of a man of God are pure. The word "pure" implies that there is no wrong mixture in the composition of the righteous man. The nature of the pure man is genuine. The pure man is one who acts according to rule. He carries that rule in his conscience. II. THE NATURE OF THE WORK OF THE MAN OF GOD. It is right, and therefore reliable. The man of God works as faithfully behind your back as before your face. He is always ready for any good work. His work is for the benefit of others. The man who sincerely desires to be pure in his motives and life is upheld by Divine power. The man of God has an inward source of happiness which does not depend on outward things. (*W. Birch.*) *The works of the righteous*.—A Christian is like the rose that drinks the dew as the sunbeam opens all its folds, then sheds a grateful fragrance on the wings of every gentle breeze which blows across it. Like also the rose, which spreads its varied colours to the sight of each beholding eye, proclaiming thus His glory; the glory of Him who sustains the shining sun, and sends refreshing morn and evening dew. So, the believer drinking of the flowing streams of love Divine, the heart-cheering promises of grace, with generous heart and bounteous hand, diffuses blessings like a fragrance around him, and blesses the place where he dwells. (*H. G. Salter.*)

Ver. 13. Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.—*The cry of the poor*.—I. SOCIAL DISTRESS. "The cry of the poor." The poor may be divided into two classes. 1. The deserving. There is a poverty that comes on men by circumstances over which they have no control: infirm bodies, diseased faculties, social oppression, untoward events. Such poverty is often associated not only with great intelligence, but with virtue and piety of a high order. 2. The undeserving. II. SOCIAL HEARTLESSNESS. "Whoso stoppeth his ears." 1. The wealthy. 2. The legislating. In the name of heaven, what is the good of a government if it cannot overcome pauperism? III. SOCIAL RETRIBUTION. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *An unmerciful disposition*.—1. We may always expect, both in general society and in the Church of God, "the rich and poor to meet together." Wherever there has been property it has been in various portions; and were there an equal division of property to-day, there would be a difference to-morrow. There are varieties of poverty; for poverty is a relative and comparative term. And among the indigent and dependent poor there are also varieties—the industrious and the indolent; the sober and the intemperate; the virtuous and the vicious, the deserving and the undeserving. 2. Nothing can be of greater consequence than marking this distinction, and regulating our charity accordingly. There is a "stopping of the ears" that is at times a virtue—requiring an effort of self-denying principle in opposition to the mere emotion and impulse of present pity. Charity must be exercised judiciously. 3. The sin here reproved is an unmerciful disposition; unfeeling hardness of heart; pitiless, avaricious, gripping selfishness. This may be exemplified in beating down the wages of the poor labourer and artisan; in the denial of protection to the poor when it is pleaded for against oppression, and when we have it in our power to afford it. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 15. It is joy to the just to do judgment.—*The pleasure of doing right*.—The text virtually says, When good magistrates discharge their trust faithfully, and execute justice impartially, all honest and good men are greatly rejoiced at it, but it brings a sore terror and consternation upon the workers of iniquity. I. IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE TO A JUST MAN TO DO JUSTICE. 1. Because it is acting according to his own inclinations. It is always pleasant to a man to pursue the natural or

habitual inclinations of his mind. Even evil and naughty inclinations make it pleasant in some degree for the time to act according to them. 2. Because he knows that he does well in so doing, and that his action is approved by Almighty God. 3. Because of the assured hope it gives him of God's favour, who is evermore a lover and rewarder of the upright. 4. Because it is a high honour done him by Almighty God to be employed in doing part of His work. For it is God that is the great doer of justice to all His creatures. II. IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE TO THE SPECTATORS, IF THEY BE RIGHTEOUS AND GOOD MEN, TO SEE GOOD MAGISTRATES FAITHFULLY DISCHARGING THEIR DUTY IN THE EXECUTION OF JUSTICE. 1. Because this is a thing so very necessary and so beneficial to mankind. 2. There are some particular cases wherein it is more especially a pleasant thing to do justice or to see it well done. III. THE EXECUTION OF JUSTICE IS TERRIBLE TO EVIL-DOERS. It must needs be so, since it is they who suffer by it. IV. INJUSTICE AND WICKEDNESS WILL MOST CERTAINLY BRING A MAN TO RUIN WITHOUT REPENTANCE. In this world it cannot otherwise be but some will escape from justice, as it is executed by men. There is One above whom no man can deceive, none can bribe, who will not fail to do right to all. This doctrine will afford us motives sufficient to the duties which all or any of us are now called to. 1. To choose such a magistrate as we believe will be faithful to the trust reposed in him. 2. To discharge the great trust of magistracy accordingly, and so as to answer the hopes and expectations of good men. 3. To be aiding and assisting in the doing thereof, which is every one's duty as he has ability and opportunity. 4. To behave ourselves so that a good magistrate faithfully discharging his trust may be no terror, but a joy and comfort to us. (*Samuel Barton, D.D.*)

Ver. 16. The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.—*The wanderer's gloomy state*.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY "WANDERING OUT OF THE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING"? The book of nature and of providence is the way of understanding. This book was opened to all the heathen world, but from it they most shamefully wandered. Their philosophers erred most grossly. They wandered in following the vile affections of their own depraved hearts. Another way of understanding is the book of revelation. This was committed to the Jews as a separate and distinct people. But how much they wandered from it! Their teachers wandered from the doctrines and duties which they knew. We have the book of revelation complete, but there are those who never read the Scriptures, and there are many who wander from their precepts, preferring their own flattering conceits to the truth of God. The Bible may properly be called "the way of understanding," because it contains all we need to know of God our maker, of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and of the Holy Ghost our teacher, sanctifier, guide, and comforter. Where pure and public worship is performed, there is the way of understanding. II. THE WANDERER'S GLOOMY STATE. "The congregation of the dead" means that vast assembly which is made up of all who are dead in trespasses and sins. This is called "spiritual death." It implies the prevalence of sin in the soul. Eternal death is the separation of soul and body, the whole man, from all heavenly possessions and enjoyments for ever; and the sensation of all misery in hell—misery in full measure, without mixture, intermission, or end. (*Edward Phillips.*)

Ver. 17. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.—*The love of pleasure*.—Here is the secret of the failure of nine-tenths of our unsuccessful young men. They loved pleasure and gave themselves up to its pursuit, and so they have never got on, and never will. When poverty comes as the result of idleness and sloth and self-indulgence, it is both a curse and a shame. Poverty is, of course, a relative term. A leading business man says that only three out of every hundred who enter upon mercantile life become ultimately successful. The failures are largely due to causes that are within the young men's own control. Some young men fail through trying to acquire money by any other means than good honest work; and when a young fellow once gets on this line of rail you may say he is done for. Some remain poor because they lack business capacity. Others fail through sheer downright laziness; others through mistaking their calling, others through instability or lack of originality and enterprise. Some through extravagant sanguineness and boastfulness. What does the wise man mean by "pleasure"? We are all so constituted that the love of happiness is both a necessity of our nature and a positive duty. There is no truer index of character than the kind of object or pursuit that

affords us our intensest pleasure. The word "pleasure" is often used in the Bible in a distinctly evil sense, as denoting voluptuousness and carnality. The text reads in the margin "He that loveth sport shall be a poor man." Certain forms of "sport" in moderation are perfectly legitimate. But incalculable mischief is being wrought amongst our young men by a too great fondness for sports and amusements. The inordinate craving for excitement has much to do with the ruin of some young men. It has been the same in every age, but we should have learned more wisdom by this time of day. (*Thain Davidson, D.D.*) *Self-indulgence a source of poverty*.—Self-indulgence is prevalent amongst all classes. I. It involves an EXTRAVAGANCE OF EXPENDITURE. Pleasure is an expensive divinity. The largest fortunes must often be laid upon its altar. II. It involves a FOSTERING OF LAZINESS. The self-indulgent man becomes such a lover of ease that effort of any kind becomes distasteful; the spirit of industry forsakes him. "He that loveth pleasure, shall be a poor man; he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." But whilst it is true that self-indulgence leads to material poverty, it also leads to intellectual poverty. The man who would get his soul strong in holy resolves and righteous principles must agonise to enter in at the strait gate of habitual reflection, holy labour and earnest worship. This the self-indulgent man will not do. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Moderation in pleasure*.—Let not your recreations be lavish spenders of your time; but choose such which are healthful, short, transient, recreative, and apt to refresh you; but at no period dwell upon them, or make them your great employment; for he that spends his time in sports, and calls it recreation, is like him whose garment is all made of fringes, and his meat nothing but sauces: they are healthless, chargeable, and useless. And, therefore, avoid such games which require much time or long attendance, or which are apt to steal thy affections from more severe employments. For, to whatsoever thou hast given thy affections, thou wilt not grudge to give thy time. Natural necessity teaches us that it is lawful to relax and unbend our bow, but not to suffer it to be unready or unstrung. (*Jeremy Taylor.*)

Ver. 19. **It is better to dwell in the wilderness than with a contentious and an angry woman.**—*An angry woman*.—I. NO SOCIAL DISCOMFORT IS TO BE COMPARED TO THAT OF AN ILL-TEMPERED WIFE. A corner of the housetop would be exposed to the rain and to the storm, both of which, in Eastern countries, are generally of a violent character. Neither is the wilderness a pleasant place of abode. But it is better to dwell in either of these places than with a brawling or even with an angry woman. 1. Because one might enjoy intervals of repose. 2. Because, whatever may be the discomforts of a housetop or wilderness dwelling, they may leave the soul at rest. They can but reach the body, and the mind may be so absolutely calm or absorbed in thought as to be almost unconscious of what is passing without. II. EXTERNAL GOOD-FORTUNE IS NO PROOF AGAINST THIS DOMESTIC CURSE. The "wide house" or the "house of companionship" suggests a goodly mansion. (*W. Harris.*)

Ver. 20. **There is treasure to be desired . . . in the dwelling of the wise.**—*Treasure in the house; or proverbs of home-life*.—One simple Saxon word has talismanic power over every heart. That word is "home." Who of us can forget our home and home-life in the past? We are now what our mothers made us in that far-off time of childhood. Great are the responsibilities of home-life, for it is the seed-time of the eternal harvest. God Himself instituted the family relationship as one of His antidotes for Satan's various enticements. Terrible is the vengeance God exacts for the violation of His laws of love. Education cannot be confined to the school, academy, or college. The true educators are the street and the home. God has given to parents a mighty instrument for good in the family relationship. But home-life and home-lessons will avail little without home-love. And there should be real and attractive pleasures by the fireside and round the home-table. Obedience, truth, and love will give us treasure in the house, and will clothe us with the ornaments of grace in our earthly homes. The same qualities of mind and temper exercised towards the great All-Father in heaven will make us meet for the house above, and lay up for us there treasures that shall never fail. (*Wm. Stevens Perry, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. **He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honour.**—*Righteousness and mercy*.—In every perfect character there will be found many opposite virtues, such as gentleness and courage, energy and

patience, determination and docility, justice and mercy. We all respect the sterling worth of justice, yet justice alone would mark a defective character. It could be trusted, but not loved. Mercy alone would make one too weak. Love may lack the fidelity required to rebuke wrong, as is often seen in parental indulgence. Judicial laxity that sacrifices law, or military inefficiency that ignores discipline, are other illustrations. The wider the government, the nobler the interests to be guarded, the more imperative the need of the union of law with love, truth with gentleness. It is important to notice that this union of apparently opposing virtues does not weaken, but really makes either the more impressive in action. The rebuke of a loving father is all the more effective on account of the affection that inspires it. Justice speaks all the more terribly from the lips of a tender judge. When Washington's tears blot the order for André's execution, the awful necessity of André's doom is seen and felt at every camp-fire. In Jesus Christ we see the blending of these diverse qualities in a remarkable degree. Tender and gentle as He was, incarnate mercy, He uttered the most awful denunciations and threats of everlasting fire. The awfulness of future punishment is felt when we remember it is the "wrath of the Lamb"! This theme sheds light on certain problems of the Divine government. The universe needs a corner-stone, and human hopes an anchorage. These are found in God. The highest triumph of wisdom is seen in the harmony of diverse qualities. As our character approaches His, we can the better interpret the problems of His government that confound others. President Woolsey rightly marvels at the folly of men who legislate about the universe, pass judgment on sin and retribution, yet cannot govern their own homes, or agree on the principles of human legislation. A greater than Woolsey exclaims: "Behold the goodness and severity of God!" Christianity exhibits this union as an exclusive trait, one that commands at once the hearts and the consciences of men. At the Cross of Christ justice and mercy blend, righteousness and grace kiss each other. God is holy as well as loving. Grace makes righteousness sure and pardon free. So peace comes, for justice is not compromised in giving a pardon that we should wish to hide from righteousness. The gospel unites them in one display. We show these virtues at different times; here they appear in parallel glory. No human justice has risen to this conception, no philosophy has embodied these ideas. Grace comes to be the marvel and the loadstone of our hearts. (*Arthur Mitchell, D.D.*) *The true pursuit of mankind*:—I. **GOODNESS IS THE OBJECT.** "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy." 1. We are to follow after this supremely. 2. We are to follow after this constantly. It must be pursued, not occasionally, but always; not on the Sundays, but on the weekdays as well. II. **HAPPINESS IS THE ATTENDANT.** Life stands for happiness. The unregenerate has no true life. The righteous man will be righteously dealt with. God has established such a connection between excellence and conscience that conscience must recognise it wherever it is seen. Happiness comes as goodness is pursued. Happiness never comes to a man when he seeks it as an end. It wells out of those activities which spring from generous self-obliviating love. The unselfish and the loving have ever been the truly happy men. Happiness is the end of the universe, but God has ordained that our happiness shall grow out of our goodness. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Religion*:—Religion is here presented in two aspects. I. As a **PURSUIT.** Really to do what the text expresses implies—1. A true estimate of the objects to be pursued. "Righteousness and mercy." These are the two cardinal elements of moral excellence in all worlds, are essential to the well-being of all moral intelligences. To pursue them you must be impressed with their transcendent worth. Thus Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," &c. 2. Resolute perseverance. The pursuit of these cardinal blessings involves great difficulties. The world, the flesh, and the devil all obstruct the way. II. As a **REALISATION.** He that thus successfully pursues "findeth life, righteousness, and honour." Religion is its own reward. The good man is blessed in his deed. 1. The reward is a natural effect of the conduct. Holiness and happiness are inseparably united. 2. The reward agrees with the conduct. It grows out of it. "Life, righteousness, and honour"—these grow out of "righteousness and mercy": the fruit is of the same kind as the seed. Man's heavenly joys will not be grapes gathered from thorns but from the vine-tree of goodness, the True Vine. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 23. Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.—*The Christian governing his tongue*:—Instead of simply commanding

with supreme authority that men should keep their mouths and tongues, he graciously condescends to annex reward and blessings for its own sake. "Keepeth his soul from troubles." In keeping of God's commandments there is great reward. In proportion as any faculty is important in the use and rightful application of it, so is the neglect of it an evil, and the result of its perversion fatal in the same degree. The government of the tongue, on this principle, assumes at once its due importance. Consider the benefits that must accrue to society from the judicious use of this powerful organ on the part of those who in God's providence are fitted to exert influence over their fellows. Consider the Christian governing his tongue, with especial reference to the law and will of God. Of the ten commandments two are assigned, one in each table, to this needful admonition. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain"; "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." A careless, unreflecting use of the holy name betrays a trifling and unstable heart. But with reference to his neighbour, the Christian has the greatest need of caution as to the government of his tongue. What irreparable injury a severe remark, whether carelessly or wickedly whispered against the character of another, is sure to produce. It may be our duty to speak to the prejudice of others, but we must always be very sure that the duty is clear. In cases where the conduct of our neighbour appears doubtful, we are bound to give him the benefit of that doubt, and to feel towards him, and to speak of him, accordingly. When a Christian is reviled and calumniated, how is he to act? He should "in patience possess his soul." One topic remains—the responsible office of the tongue, employed in preaching the gospel of salvation to perishing sinners. (*Thos. Nolan, M.A.*) *An unbridled tongue*:—A furious horse needs a bridle to restrain its fierceness, and it seems the tongue of man needs more than a double bridle to keep it in from doing hurt. The wise man never ceases to admonish us about this point. As a high-spirited horse, if its fury is not curbed with a strong hand, will hurry its rider along, without regarding pits, or precipices, or deep waters, and expose him to extreme jeopardy of his life, so an unbridled tongue will make a man hateful to God and men, plunge him into contentions and debates, and expose his estate, and life, and credit, to extreme danger. Who is the man that wishes to enjoy a quiet and peaceable life? Let him set a guard over his mouth, and refrain his tongue from profaneness and corrupt communication, from railing and reviling, and all evil speaking, from foolish talking, and from inconvenient jesting. Let prudence and the fear of God stand continually like sentinels at the door of his lips. (*George Lawson, D.D.*) *Keeping the tongue*:—When trouble is brewing, keep still. When slander is getting on its legs, keep still. When your feelings are hurt, keep still till you recover from your excitement, at any rate. Things look differently through an unagitated eye. Silence is the most massive thing conceivable sometimes. It is strength in its very grandeur. It is like a regiment ordered to stand still in the mid fury of battle. To plunge in were twice as easy. The tongue has unsettled more ministers than small salaries ever did, or lack of ability. *The government of the tongue*:—I. Such a government is NECESSARY. "Whoso keepeth his mouth and tongue, keepeth his soul from troubles." What troubles come through an ungoverned tongue? 1. Troubles on self. (1) The troubles of moral remorse have often been brought into the soul through unguarded language. (2) The troubles of social distress have often come upon a man through unguarded language. Friends have been sacrificed, enemies created, litigations commenced, and fines and penalties enacted. 2. Troubles on others. An ungoverned tongue is like a river, whose embankments have given way, spreading disasters through a whole neighbourhood. In America the Indians strike a spark from flint and steel, and thus set fire to the dry grass, and the flames spread and spread until they sweep like a roaring torrent over a territory as large as England, and men and cattle have to flee for their lives. An unguarded word can produce a social conflagration greater far. II. Such a government is PRACTICABLE. The tongue is not an involuntary organ, an organ that works irrespective of the will, like the heart and lungs; it is always the servant of the mind; it never moves without volition. Heaven has endowed us with a natural sovereignty equal not only to the government of the tongue, but to all the lusts and passions that set it in motion. A finer manifestation of moral majesty you can scarcely have than in reticence under terribly exciting circumstances. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 25. The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.—*Sloth*:—Solomon attaches to it several evils. I. SUICIDE. "The desire of the

slothful killeth him." The man who is too lazy to move his limbs or open his eyes is too lazy to have a "desire." These desires kill him. There are several things that tend to kill such a man. 1. Ennui. This is what Byron calls "that awful yawn which sleep cannot abate." In all life there is not a more crushing power than lassitude. It breeds those morbid moods that explain half the diseases of the rich. 2. Disappointment. Disappointment kills. 3. Envy. The slothful sees others succeed. 4. Poverty. Sloth fills our workhouses with paupers, our prisons with criminals, our army with recruits. 5. Remorse. II. GREED. "He coveteth greedily all the day long." In the Paris French translation the words stand thus—"All the day long he does nothing but wish." How very expressive at once of the unconquerable indolence and the fretful, envious, pining unhappiness of the sluggard! III. UNRIGHTEOUSNESS. "But the righteous giveth and spareth not." This implies that the slothful are neither righteous nor generous. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 30. There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord.—*The vanity of attempting to oppose God*:—One of the most formidable methods of attacking religion is to exhibit it as a contrivance fit for narrow geniuses and mean souls. One of the most proper means to establish irreligion is to represent it as suited to great and generous minds. I. CONSIDER THE TEXT IN REGARD TO WORLDLY GRANDEUR. We sometimes see those who are called grantees in the world resist God, pretend to compel Him by superior force, or by greater knowledge. How often is grandeur even now in our times a patent for insolence against God! II. WORLDLY POLICY IS A SECOND OBSTACLE WHICH SOME MEN SET AGAINST THE LAWS OF HEAVEN. We sometimes see men forget that they are Christians, when they deliberate on the public good. III. THE VOLUPTUOUS RESIST GOD. One of the most inviolable laws of God is, that felicity should be the reward of virtue, and misery the punishment of vice. What does a voluptuous man oppose against the execution of this law? Noise, company, diversions, the refinements of lasciviousness. Examine the system of the voluptuary at the bar of reason, and at the bar of conscience. Consider it in the declining time of life, and in view of death and punishment. IV. A STOICAL OBSTINACY IS AN OBSTACLE WHICH SOME PLACE AGAINST THE PURPOSES OF GOD. Hath Zeno any disciples now? Yes, there are yet people who, under another name, maintain the same sentiments, affect unshaken firmness, and glory in preserving their tranquillity under all the extremes of fortune. (J. Saurin.)

CHAPTER XXII.

VER. 1. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.—*On good character, or general esteem of mankind*:—While our Maker has left us greatly in the dark about unimportant and disputable matters, He has given plain directions concerning the performance of our duty. There is nothing more closely connected with virtue and happiness than reputation. Throughout the Word of God we are excited by examples, as well as by precepts, to aim diligently at obtaining a good report. I. THE WRONGNESS OF HAVING TOO LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT OUR REPUTATION. There are those who affect indifference to what a silly or malicious world may think or say of them. They say that avoiding censure is impossible. It is true that sometimes innocent and prudent persons may fall under very cruel imputations; but they rarely continue under them. Professing to despise the ill opinion of mankind creates a shrewd suspicion that we have deserved it. Innocent persons must distinguish themselves by a constant, though unaffected, attention to their reputation. A good name is what a bad person cannot secure. And therefore you who can should on no account fail of doing it. The judgment of others concerning us deserves respect. Preservation of mutual esteem makes persons amiable to each other. Persons who care not what they are thought are in a very likely way not to care what they do. Contempt of reputation is contrary to our worldly interests. An eminently fair character prepossesses everybody in favour of him who bears it, engages friendly treatment, begets trust and confidence, gives credit and weight. Such persons are always sought after and employed. The feeling of being esteemed is one of the joyfulest feelings in the heart of man. Another consideration is, that though offenders often return completely to their duty, it is but seldom and imper-

fectly that they ever regain their characters when once forfeited. II. THE WRONGNESS OF SHOWING AN OVER-REGARD TO OUR REPUTATION. Many think a fair appearance is all they want. Many think that if they are guilty of nothing which the world thinks enormous, they are quite as good as they need be. A worse case of immoderate regard to our reputation is when, to raise or preserve it, we transgress our duty. The esteem of the worthless is very ill-purchased at the price of becoming like them. The most fatal consequences daily proceed from persons being led by the folly of others rather than their own good sense and that of their discreeter and more experienced friends. Frequently prejudices of education, worldly interest, vehemence of temper, hurry men into wrong-doing. Often the sole inducement is, that if they should stop short their friends would look coldly upon them, and think meanly of them, and they cannot bear the reproach of not having been true to their side or party. In preferring the good opinion of others to their own conscience, persons who have been guilty of some folly or sin will be guilty of almost anything to cover it rather than expose themselves. Another bad way of aiming at reputation is, when we demolish that of others to raise our own, and build it on the ruins. They who are known to give such treatment generally meet, as they well deserve, with a double share of it. Candour towards all of whom we speak is the true art of obtaining it towards ourselves. Besides those who are led into any of these sins by an undue fondness for reputation, they also are blamable who allow it to give them too much uneasiness. A good name may be the subject of too much anxiety. Undue solicitude for fame is sure to bring us distress. It is injustice to demand of the world more regard than we have a right to. Persons who claim too much are frequently driven to unfair and even criminal methods of getting their claim allowed. There is not upon earth a more ensnaring temptation than that of too fond a self-complacency. (*Abp. Secker.*) *The elements of the great and good are not—1. Great wealth, nor—2. Splendid genius, nor—3. Self-advertisement. I. MODESTY IS AN ELEMENT. II. TENACITY OF PURPOSE. III. MIGHTY RESERVE POWER. IV. MORALITY AND RELIGION. (Homiletic Review.)* A good name should be guarded:—Be wondrous wary of your first comportments; get a good name, and be very tender of it afterwards, for it is like the Venice-glass, quickly cracked, never to be mended, though patched it may be. To this purpose, take along with you this fable. It happened that Fire, Water, and Fame went to travel together; they consulted, that if they lost one another, how they might be retrieved, and meet again. Fire said, "Where you see smoke there you shall find me." Water said, "Where you see marsh and moorish, low ground there you shall find me." But Fame said, "Take heed how you lose me; for, if you do, you will run a great hazard never to meet me again: there's no retrieving of me." (*Howell's "Familiar Letters, 1634."*)

Ver. 2. The rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker of them all.—*The mixture of rich and poor:—I. IN ALL CIVIL SOCIETIES THERE ARE RICH AND THERE ARE POOR PEOPLE.* This is the unavoidable consequence of the constitution of things. It will appear so if we examine whence ariseth wealth and whence poverty. Riches arise from three causes. 1. The virtues and abilities of men. 2. From the vices of men. 3. From chance or good-fortune; from events towards which the rich man himself contributes little or nothing. To the same three causes poverty may also be ascribed. Not only nations are necessarily divided into rich and poor, but there must be also a perpetual fluctuation of property, by which the rich becomes poor, and the poor become rich, so that neither state is of a fixed and permanent nature. The poor will always be far more numerous than the rich. Whilst there is human liberty, whilst there are virtues and vices, whilst there are vicissitudes of fortune and revolutions of affairs, there must be in all times and places a mixture of high and low, rich and poor. Providence permits it, and in some sense may be said to appoint it, since it results from the nature and constitution of this world. II. THE MORAL REFLECTION MADE BY SOLOMON UPON THIS INEQUALITY. The Lord is the maker of them all. They have one common parent. In that respect they are equal. If so, there should be no great difference as to real happiness between them. Is there much disparity in point of happiness between the great and the small, the master and the servant, the gentleman and the labourer, the rich and the poor? Superficial observers of human nature and human life will judge without hesitation that the rich have every advantage on their side. But to have honour and authority, unless it be honestly acquired and decently supported, is to be raised to splendid infamy. Power wantonly

exercised is the undesirable opportunity of doing mischief. Wealth used for vile purposes, or for no good purposes, can be no real blessing to the master or the hoarder of it. Independency rightly understood is sometimes a blessing, but it is sometimes a calamity. The poor are, or may be, more free from uneasiness than the rich. They have fewer desires, fewer false and artificial wants, more moderate expectations, &c., and these sorts of cares and commotions are no small abatements of human happiness. The poor have usually better health. The extremes either of plenty or of indigence usually occasion various distempers, and shorten the thread of human life. They therefore who are in a middle state between wealth and want should be thankful for their lot, and instead of envying those who are above them, should consider how many are placed below them. If the whole property and revenue of a country were equally divided amongst the inhabitants, they would be reduced to a state approaching very nearly to poverty. If all the inhabitants of a Christian nation were to live up exactly to the precepts of our Lord and the exhortation of His apostles, excessive wealth and extreme indigence would hardly be found among them. There are three precepts or laws of Christianity which tend directly to remove these extremes; and they are the law of charity, the law of industry, and the law of temperance. (*J. Jortin, D.D.*)

The ranks of rich and poor :—The constitution of things being such that the labour of one man, or the labour of several, is sufficient to procure more necessities than he or they stand in need of, this immediately gave room for riches to arise in the world, and for men's acquiring them by honest means. Thus some would acquire greater plenty of necessities than they had occasion for; and others, by contrary means, or by cross accidents, would be in want of them. A family with more than was wanted for necessities would soon develop secondary wants, and inventions for the supply of them, the fruits of leisure and ease, came to employ much of men's time and leisure. Hence a new species of riches came into the world. By and by the superfluities of life took in a vastly larger compass of things than the necessities of it. Then luxury made its inroad, and all the numerous train of evils its attendants, of which poverty is far from being the worst. If riches had continued to consist only in things necessary or luxurious, this must have embarrassed trade and commerce, and kept riches in the hands of a few. It was agreed to substitute something more lasting and portable, which should pass everywhere in commerce for real natural riches. Money was to answer for all things. The improvement of trade and commerce has, very happily, enlarged the middle rank of people, who are, in good measure, free from the vices of the highest and the lowest part of mankind. The ranks of rich and poor being thus formed, they meet together—they continue to make up one society. Their mutual want unites them inseparably, but they meet upon a footing of great inequality. The superiority on the one hand, and the independence on the other, are in no sort accidental, but arise necessarily from a settled providential dispensation of things for their common good. This implies duties to each other. The lower rank of mankind go on for the most part in some tract of living, into which they got by direction and example; and to this their understanding and discourse, as well as labour, are greatly confined. Then what influence and power their superiors must have over them! The rich have the power of doing a great deal of good, but this power is given them by way of trust, in order to their keeping down that vice and misery with which the lower people would otherwise be quite overrun. The rich are charged by natural providence, as much as by revealed appointment, with the care of the poor. This is not a burden, but a privilege attached to riches. Observations on public charities: 1. What we have to bestow in charity being a trust, we must satisfy ourselves that we bestow it upon proper objects of charity. 2. Public charities are examples of great influence. 3. All public charities should be regarded as open to counsels of improvement. 4. Our laws and whole constitution, civil and ecclesiastical, go more upon supposition of an equality amongst mankind than the constitution and laws of other countries. 5. Let our charity towards men be exalted into piety towards God, from the serious consideration that we are all His creatures. (*Bp. Butler.*)

The rich and poor meet together :—In the distinction between the rich and the poor there is something not altogether pleasant to the human mind. We are apt to recoil from it. Frequently the dissatisfaction increases as we can discover no just rule for the unequal distribution of riches. The mind of the author of this proverb was led away from the distinctions between these two classes to notice agreements between these classes. 1. There is a substantial agreement between rich and poor in their origin and their situation as they enter the world. They are equally

dependent, equally helpless, equally miserable. 2. In their training and preparation for after-life. 3. A value is set upon riches as a means of enjoyment or usefulness. With the rich and poor alike there is a desire for wealth which arises from the hope of making it useful to one's own. 4. But for cherished erroneous notions, the rich and the poor would act together with more efficiency and more good-will. Public good would be more promoted. 5. Between rich and poor there is a substantial agreement in all the organs of perception and enjoyment. The poor man's organisation throughout is as perfect as the rich man's. 6. In the intellectual faculties there is a strong resemblance. 7. And in the original passions of men. 8. They are alike in their natural and equal dependence upon one another. Neither class can dispense with the other and stand independent and alone. 9. There is a nearly equal distribution of the disappointments, vexations, and distresses of life. 10. There is perfect equality among men in their capabilities for religion. (*J. S. Spencer, D.D.*) *The relative duties of the rich and poor* :—Nothing is made for itself, or made to terminate in its own being. I. THE FOUNDATION OF THE RELATIVE DUTIES OF THE RICH AND POOR. 1. They have one Creator, who is also the Father of all. 2. They are brought together into the same society or department of being. Society is a Divine constitution, and an important ingredient of happiness. In society mankind exists in different relations to each other. In respect to them the law of dependence, which pervades the whole universe, prevails. II. WHAT ARE THE RELATIVE AND RECIPROCAL DUTIES OF RICH AND POOR? 1. One duty of the rich is benevolent bestowment; to supply the need of the poor, to aid them in their necessities. 2. Another duty is that of employment. 3. The enactment of just laws. 4. The practical recognition of the great fact of an universal religious equality. The poor owe—(1) Gratitude to their benefactors. (2) Contentment with reasonable wages. (3) Regard to the interests of their employers. (*F. A. Cox, D.D., LL.D.*) *Points of agreement in the state of the rich and the poor* :—

I. IN THE PARTICIPATION OF A COMMON NATURE. Poor and rich have equally the power of ascertaining general principles; their moral sensibilities are the same; in devotion the two classes meet. They are alike in the primary passions of the human mind. The more we analyse actions, and trace them to their primary elements, the more we shall perceive the identity between the rich and the poor as to their intellectual, moral, accountable, and devotional capacities. II. IN THE PROCESS OF THE SAME SOCIAL ECONOMY. III. IN THE HOUSE OF GOD. In the presence of the great and good Being men should forget all their distinctions, and recollect their essential relation to Him who is equally the Father of all mankind. IV. IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR ENTRANCE INTO THIS WORLD, AND IN THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THEIR EXIT OUT OF IT. Learn—1. That those who are rich should recollect that they are rich for the purpose of benefiting their generation. Let such persons consider seriously whether they are living to themselves or to God. 2. Not to repine if we are poor and yet partakers of true piety springing from the faith of the gospel. (*Robert Hall.*) *The doctrine of human equality* :—There are great points of resemblance between all men sufficient to constitute a true equality. 1. All possess an intellectual and immortal nature. Mind is a common possession. The immortality of the soul stamps all men with equal honour. 2. The fact of a common possession among all classes of the social and domestic affections establishes the doctrine of human equality. The same heart of love towards friends and kindred beats in the breast of the highest and lowest. 3. The doctrine of human equality is established by the universal distribution of vice and virtue. Everywhere you will find sin. That is a common heritage. So with virtue. You will find grand specimens of piety and goodness in the dwellings of the rich, the middle class, and the poor. 4. The doctrine of human equality is established by our common inheritance of infirmities, suffering, bereavements, sorrow, and death. The same physical weakness enfeebles rich and poor. They are subject to the same diseases. They experience the same mental anguish. Learn—(1) To see the mischief—the sin—of those who endeavour to sever, in thought and sympathy, man from man. What is specially needed now is sympathy between the various classes of society. (2) That this doctrine of human equality supplies a basis for the adaptation of the gospel to our needs. (*W. Walters.*) *Rich and poor* :—1. According to the very constitution of human nature, great social distinctions do and must exist. While we acquiesce in this fact as inevitable, it is important that we take a right view of it. 2. The rich and poor, with many outward differences, meet together in the possession of a common nature, which is greater than all the circumstances of life. 3. The rich and poor meet together in

a large intermediate class. The blending of classes is not less remarkable than their separation. 4. The rich and poor meet together in the common enjoyment of all the greater blessings of life. The most valuable blessings of life are those which are scattered broadcast over the world, and which come to all alike, as does the bright shining of the sun. 5. The rich and poor meet together in all the more important and deeper experiences of life. The great events, which stir the deepest feelings of man's heart—birth, marriage, death—occur in every household.

✓ 6. The rich and poor meet together in that they are all alike, and without exception, sinners, involved in one common ruin, exposed to one common doom. This is one of the most unpalatable truths of the Bible. 7. The rich and poor meet together in this—they have presented unto them a common salvation. There is only one gospel for rich and poor. Social and national distinctions find no place in the gospel of Christ. If men are to be saved at all, they can only be saved in one way, by the exercise of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the one Saviour. (T. M. Morris.)

Rich and poor:—I. VARIOUS WAYS IN WHICH RICH AND POOR CANNOT AVOID MEETING TOGETHER. 1. They belong to the same creation. They meet together, then, as brethren—"all one Man's sons," who will have His children live together in unity. 2. They are placed together by their common Maker in the same world, and in a state of necessary dependence on each other. 3. Although there is a wide separation between rich and poor in point of education, habits, and manners, yet these outward differences are as nothing in comparison with their common nature, to which they bear the same relation as the clothes to the body. View them in regard to their natural appetites, bodily and mental capacities, social and domestic affections; in all these things they meet together as equals, and we plainly see that one "Lord is the Maker of them all." 4. If now, dismissing worldly considerations, we contemplate them as they must appear to their Maker, we shall see the distance between them absolutely vanish, and nothing to prevent their meeting together on a footing of perfect equality. All souls are alike, and religion addresses itself to all alike. 5. Rich and poor, thus meeting together in the enjoyment of the same Christian privileges, should also meet together in the exhibition of a renewed heart and a gracious character, the fruits of a common faith. II. EXHORT BOTH

RICH AND POOR TO A VOLUNTARY MEETING OF EACH OTHER; not only as being brought together by the appointment of Providence, but as seeking and making advances towards each other. 1. It is not enough that the rich should not oppress the poor; thanks to the equity of our laws, this is not to any serious extent in their power; nor that they should not despise the poor, which we hope is not in their inclination; but the rich must protect and assist and honour and sympathise with their poorer brethren. 2. But if it be the duty of the rich thus to meet the poor, it is no less incumbent on the poor to make advances towards the rich, and "meet them halfway." (J. H. Burn, B.D.)

Social relations:—Rich and poor meet together in their relation and dependence on each other, as members of society and common heirs of Christ's salvation. They meet together in their duties. They meet together in their joint properties. They meet together in their dearest interests, both of this life and of that which is to come. The rich man may be reminded that the city cannot be inhabited without the artisans and smiths and labours. The poor man should be told that the capacity of his superiors is of another order from his own, and that the duty of different stations is different; each has his own opportunities, and his own responsibilities. Rich men are necessary to the well-being of the poor, and the poor are essential to the existence of wealth. The necessities of all ranks connect all. The wants of the rich convey comforts to the poor; the wants of the poor minister to the abundance of the rich. Such are the gracious dispensations of a kind Providence. Let us all be thankful for what we have, and not repine that we have no more. (G. D. Hill, M.A.)

The poor and the rich:—All through the Scriptures the point of view is God's, not man's. To understand any part of the Bible we must look at it from the Divine standpoint. This applies to the text. In that day the contrast between rich and poor was far greater than now. If man had spoken he would have said, "The rich and poor are divided; their interests are at war, and cannot be made to harmonise." The rich have manifest advantages.

1. They have opportunities for improvement which the poor have not. 2. They have means of influence which the poor have not. In other respects observe the essential sameness of these two classes. (1) The faculties of the mind in both rich and poor are essentially the same. (2) The same moral natures are in both. (3) They are alike responsible. (4) In the eye of God they meet together in their destiny. (5) They meet together in their sinfulness. (6) They are the same in their

relation to the plan of salvation. Both are one at the centre. God equalises. The differences are slight. The differences are reciprocal and transient, while the points of agreement are permanent. Those who set the one class against the other are moving backward toward the feudal ages, whether they know it or not—a time when the poor was servant to the rich. The glory of our age is that the differences between the classes are being obliterated. They are meeting together. Our souls are being lifted to a comprehension of this exalted ideal of the Scriptures. (R. S. Storrs, D.D.)

The equality of men.—I. CLEARLY STATE THE SUBJECT.

II. SHOW THAT IT IS THE WILL OF GOD THAT THERE SHOULD BE DISTINCTIONS OF RICH AND POOR IN THE WORLD. 1. Evident from Scriptures. 2. It is not inconsistent with God's justice, and is an argument for His wisdom. III. APPLICATIONS.

1. The rich should always acknowledge God in all their enjoyments. 2. The poor should be contented. 3. Apart from riches and poverty, all men are equal—they have the same nature, the same care of Providence, the same Christian privileges, and the same judgment. (H. Grove.)

Ultimate Divine impartiality.—The idea of ultimate impartiality is what is chiefly suggested by the latter part of this verse, "the Lord is the Maker of them all." He is so by creation. They alike owe to Him their being, and owe to Him every moment the maintenance of that being—the rich man and the honourable, as well as the poorest and meanest on earth. Where is the monarch on the throne that, more than the lowest of his subjects, can draw a breath independently of God? He is so by providential allotment. The same Lord makes them what they are, and could at His pleasure reverse their conditions, making the rich the poor and the poor the rich. The Lord being the Maker of them all implies also the equal distance of them all, as alike His creatures, from their common Creator and Governor. The distance is the same. In both it is infinite. When God is the object of common comparison, the distance between the highest and the lowest of mankind measures not a hair's breadth; it is annihilated. All the distinctions of which men make so much sink into nothing before His infinite majesty. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

The true corrective of social inequalities.—The text does not mean that both rich and poor are mingled in society, that they oppose or encounter one another, but rather that they are alike, that with all their differences there is still something common to both. What is this common ground, the point of contact and agreement? Not an absolute identity or sameness of condition, but participation in a certain good common to both, and independent of external qualities. The true corrective of all social inequalities, so far as they are evil, must be furnished, not by human institutions and arrangements, but derived from a higher and independent source. Consider how and why the religion of the Bible is adapted to exert this influence. Men's schemes for the practical solution of this great problem are three. 1. The idea of obliterating social inequalities by a coercive distribution of all property. This method is condemned by its violent injustice, by the meanness of its aims, by the hypocrisy of its professions. 2. The idea of securing an equality of civil rights in spite of personal and social disadvantages. As a positive means of correcting the effects of providential inequalities, this is as worthless as the other. 3. The idea of remedying the evil by means of intellectual increase and knowledge and refinement of taste. The objection to this remedy is that when applied alone its influence is not necessarily or wholly good. (1) Christianity distinctly recognises the existence and necessity of some providential inequalities in the external situation of mankind. (2) Its remedy is the direct mitigation of the evils of society by the change wrought in the tempers and affections of the parties. And true religion attaches to the various degrees of wealth, refinement, knowledge, influence, and leisure their corresponding measures of responsibility. It makes each party, to some extent, content with his actual condition, aware of its peculiar obligations, and spontaneously disposed to discharge them. (3) By a process of moral elevation men are first taught to surmount their disadvantages, and then by one of intellectual elevation the classes are brought nearer together. Impress the necessity for popular religious education, not only as the means of personal improvement and salvation, but also as the grand corrective and perhaps the sovereign cure of the disorders which now prey upon society, and "eat as doth a canker." Religious education has a social and secular as well as an exclusively religious use. The true secret of the "healing of the nations." (J. A. Alexander, D.D.)

Relations of rich and poor.—The man in want murmurs that God has given him so little; the man in affluence forgets that God has given him so much. A want of sympathy arises between the different classes; they meet in jealousy, not in love. Differences ought to be viewed, not as

specially hurtful to any, but as generally good for all. One man is not nearer God or farther from God than another. God is not only the maker of all men as men, He is the maker of all as rich and poor. He fixes their civil conditions. The unequal state is the appointment of His providence. Men meet together by nature as equal; in the eye of the world as unequal; in both cases for good. None is in prosperity or adversity without affecting others. What, then, are the duties which each owes the other, and which both owe to God? (*Canon Harvey, M.A.*) *Seeing men as God sees them* :—How the scales seems to fall away from one's eyes directly we are enabled to see things as God sees them! The sacred worth of humanity shines far brighter than any of its tinsel happiness. We learn to estimate ourselves aright, undisturbed, and unabashed by the false estimates which are current in the world. Our true distinction is that we are men, that we belong to a race which was made in the image of God, was dear to His heart, and is redeemed by His love. The equality we claim for men is not a levelling down—it is quite the reverse; it is raising them up to the higher level, which they have deserted and forgotten. It is giving men self-respect instead of self-esteem. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*)

The common humanity :—I. RICH AND POOR MEET TOGETHER IN THEIR ORDINARY ALLOTMENTS OF LIFE. II. IN THE ORDINARY CHARACTERISTICS OF THEIR NATURE. 1. The body has the same number of bones and muscles, nerves and sinews, in any of which disease may fasten and pain may enter. 2. Nor is our exposure any the less in our minds. 3. Our sensibilities are the same. III. IN THEIR DESTINIES IN THE COMMON HEREAFTER. 1. We all meet at the grave. 2. We all meet at the judgment. 3. We all meet in eternity. IV. IN THEIR RIGHTS UNDER THE GOSPEL. 1. There is the same need in the fallen nature. 2. The same supply furnished in the inexhaustible mercy of a crucified Redeemer. 3. The same clear condition annexed to the call. 4. The same unalterable pledge annexed to the promise. 5. The same fullness of fruition held out in answer to every hope at the last. There is no property qualification whatsoever for citizenship in the kingdom of God. (*Chas. S. Robinson, D.D.*)

The ordination of wealth and poverty :—God makes some rich that they may be charitable to the poor; and others poor that they may be serviceable to the rich; and they have need of one another. He makes some poor to exercise their patience, and contentment, and dependence on God; and others rich to exercise their thankfulness and benevolence. All stand upon the same level before God. (*Matthew Henry.*) *Diverse social conditions* :—No dispensation of Providence appears, at first sight, more advantageous to mankind than the diversity of conditions. The prince has need of his people, and the people have need of their prince; the politician has need of the soldiers, and the soldiers have need of the politician. This consciousness of the need which we have of our fellow-creatures is the strong tie which binds us to them. Yet, by the depravity of the human race, this useful order has been miserably abused. On one side the great have been dazzled by their own splendour, and hence have become haughty, disdainful, and oppressive. On the other, the low, forgetting the dignity which naturally cleaves to a reasonable soul, have become fawning and mean; have bowed down to imaginary divinities and crouched before phantoms of grandeur. Both parties have acquired their erroneous ideas from neglecting to consider themselves in a proper point of view. The nature of man consists of a spirit united to a body; and this description applies to the whole race. The soul of the poor man, as well as that of the rich, has the power of considering principles, of drawing consequences, of discerning truth from falsehood, of choosing good or evil, of seeking for the most glorious and useful attainments. His body, too, bears the same characters of skill and exquisite contrivance: it is harmonious in its parts, just in its motions, and proportioned in its powers. As their powers are the same, so too are their weaknesses. The soul of the rich, like that of the poor, is subject to the influence of the passions. Nor do their privileges differ more; for though a poor man cannot exercise the authority of the great, nor obtain the reputation of immortal heroes, yet he may aspire to honours infinitely greater. He has a right of raising himself to God by the ardour of his prayers; and he can assure himself, without danger or delusion, that the great God will regard and answer his prayers. Nothing shows so much the meanness of the great as the value which they set on exterior advantages, for thus they renounce their true and proper grandeur. The glory of man consists not in that he is rich, noble, a lord, or a king, but in that he is a man, a being formed after the image of God, and capable of the sublimest attainments. What are the views of God with regard to men? What end does He propose in placing us on this planet, thirty,

forty, or fourscore years? He intends it as our time of trial. On this principle, what is the most glorious condition? It is not that which raiseth us in society; nor that which procures us the greatest honours and accommodations of life, for it is more glorious to be a good subject than a wicked king, to be a good disciple than a profligate teacher. There is no profession shameful if it is not vicious. There is, indeed, something more noble in the objects of some professions than of others. There is something much greater in the design of a magistrate making and executing laws for the good of mankind and in that of a mechanic practising the simplest arts. But God will not determine our everlasting state according to the design of our professions, but according to the execution; in that respect all professions are equal, and all men have the same destination. Mankind, then, are essentially equal in their nature, their privileges, and their destination. Above all this, equality is eminently conspicuous in their end. We may labour to acquire a portion of honest fame, to augment our fortune, to establish our reputation, and sweeten, as far as we can, the cares of life, for this the morality of the gospel does not condemn; but still we must carry this labour no farther than it deserves; it must not be our chief care. God has given to the great ones of the earth an exterior glory, transient and superficial; but to the humble and the patient He has given that glory which is real, solid, and permanent; and what is there difficult to a wise man in submitting to this order of Providence? It may, in some respects indeed, be mortifying to lurk in the lowest ranks of society when one feels sentiments of greatness and elevation in the soul. But those things will soon pass away; soon shall we enter on a world where those distinctions shall be abolished, and all that is great in the immortal mind shine forth in full splendour. (*A. Macdonald.*)

The diversity of station and outward prosperity among mankind:—I. THE DIVERSITY OF STATION, OF POWER, OF AUTHORITY, OF WEALTH, AND THE LIKE, IS INHERENT IN THE NATURE OF MAN. Men are diverse in their natural capacities, abilities, and inclinations. But this diversity rests not altogether on chance or on injustice of mankind, since it originates, if not in the very nature of the soul, yet surely in the constitution of the body which it inhabits, the external objects by which man is environed, the early education that he receives and the climate allotted him for his abode, and which cannot possibly be everywhere the same.

II. The proof, however, that the difference of station is necessarily inherent in our nature WILL NOT PACIFY THE DISCONTENTED MAN. He will probably complain of this necessity, that he is subjected to it against his will. But will he justly do so if we prove to him that God in this institution had the wisest and kindest designs in view, and that it is in reality calculated to procure to every one in particular and to all in general manifold and important benefits? 1. Certain it is that without the diversity of estates and conditions of life, we should be absolutely obliged to forego very many of the conveniences which we may enjoy. We should be more independent, but we should also have less support in weakness, less protection in dangers, less help in misery, less relief in distress. And how burdensome would life become if every one were obliged to provide himself necessaries alone, every one to procure and prepare for himself whatever he wanted for his maintenance, for his food and clothing, for his recreation and his amusement! 2. By this regulation established by the Deity mankind have the best opportunity for employing their several capacities, faculties, and endowments, and of carrying them to the highest degree of perfection which they can here attain. The difference of states and conditions of life introduces a great variety of projects and designs, of occupations, exertions, labours, and amusements. 3. By means of this Divine economy every species of satisfaction and pleasure is enjoyed whereof mankind are capable, and these satisfactions and pleasures, taken together, constitute unquestionably the greatest possible sum of happiness or of agreeable sensations that could have place in the present state of man. How few the species of pleasure to which mankind would be restricted if they were in all respects equal! 4. This diversity of station and outward prosperity are excellent means of exercising us in virtue, and so of rendering us capable of the perfection and happiness of another life. Conclusion: 1. Let every one of us be contented with his situation. Acquire the habit of viewing it on the most agreeable side—that God knows us far better than we know ourselves, and is uniformly consulting our welfare. 2. Let each of us only act up to his station with all possible fidelity in every particular. 3. Let us with extraordinary diligence strive after a superior station in a future world. (*G. J. Zollkofer.*)

The poor not to be despised:—Leslie, the painter, tells us of his hearing the preference expressed by Rogers for seats in churches without

pews opposed by a gentleman who preferred pews, and said, "If there were seats only, I might find myself sitting by my coachman." Rogers replied, "And perhaps you may be glad to find yourself beside him in the next world." (*Francis Jacox.*)

Ver. 3. A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself.—*Seen and unseen evils of life* :—The great mass of mankind live at hazard, so far as the final end of life is concerned. No certain destination is in their view, nor is their life guided by any central principle. There is a right object at which to aim, a high purpose that should be the centre of every human life, giving it unity and strength. I. CONSIDER THE NATURE OF PROVIDENCE IN THE CONDUCT OF LIFE. Prudence and providence have a close kinship. The word providence expresses the special idea or particular act of providing, while prudence denotes the foresight which shows itself in habit, or the manner of providing. 1. Here is the lowest and basest kind of prudence that stands in opposition to a higher moral life. This is an evil prudence. Self is at the centre of it. 2. Then there is a prudence which might be called neutral, and which is not incompatible with spiritual growth. 3. There is a prudence that is subservient to the higher principle itself. True religion and genuine prudence are allied. II. OBSERVE THE VALUE OF PRUDENCE IN THE AFFAIRS OF LIFE. The prudent man can look behind and before, can estimate probabilities, can consider cause and effect. He decries the future, and is warned. He needs his prudence in the secular affairs of the world. The moral fibre of a man has much more to do with his material surroundings and well-being than many persons seem to think. The prudent man avoids temptations that may be too much for his moral strength. III. THE DOOM OF THOUGHTLESSNESS. Recklessness brings on ruin. Punishment is not arbitrary, but necessary. (*Daniel Jackson.*) *Prudent and simple* :—I. THE SPECIFICATION OF THE PERSONS. Prudent and simple; that is, righteous and wicked. Godly men are in Scripture described as wise men, and wicked men are spoken of as fools. That godly men are truly wise appears in those qualities, and actions, and principles, and properties which belong to them. 1. A godly man hath the true principle of wisdom in him. Wisdom is not a fit but a habit, and implies a spring and principle for the nourishing of it. The right principle of wisdom is a gracious and savoury spirit, the work of regeneration, and the new creature in us. 2. What a man propounds to himself has its influence upon his wisdom. The godly man's aims are heavenly and spiritual. 3. Wisdom is seen in regard to the rule whereby he is led. It is the part of a wise man to have good rules. The Christian's rule is the Word of God. 4. In regard to the object whereabout he is conversant, which is the gospel, the doctrine of wisdom. II. THE DIFFERENT ACCOUNT WHICH IS GIVEN TO EACH. 1. The account of the prudent. He is discovered as to his spiritual judgment and apprehension, and spirit of discerning. "He foreseeth the evil." This foresight he has by the dictates of the Word of God; by the concurrence of one thing with another; by the inward hints and suggestions of the Spirit of God. He is discovered in reference to activity and practice. "And hides himself." This is done in the exercise of all such graces as are pertinent hereunto: such as meekness, humility, repentance, faith, charity. A godly man hides himself in the whole work of self-reformation and holiness of life. 2. The account of the foolish. Their carriage: "They pass on." This is an expression of security, and of pertinacity or progress in sin. Sin blinds the judgment, carries away the heart, and fills men with vain hopes. The more deceitful and fraudulent sin is, the more watchful and vigilant should we be. 2. Their miscarriage, or ill-condition. They "are punished." Sin and judgment are relatives, and infer one another. They "pass on, and are punished." That is, they are punished because they pass on. Security is the great promoter of punishment, in the nature of things, and in the justice of God. (*T. Horton, D.D.*) *Hiding-places for the prudent* :—One main element of safety is a just apprehension of danger. There are encompassing dangers and safe hiding-places in the several regions of our secular business, our moral conduct, and our religious hopes. 1. In the ordinary business of life. For example, when speculation is rife. 2. In the region of practical morality. Frivolous and licentious companions, theatres, Sabbath amusements, and a multitude of cognate enticements. 3. The greatest evils lie in the world to come, and only the eye of faith can foresee them. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *Good and bad prudence* :—We are not called upon anywhere in the Bible to make little calculations, small and selfish arrangements, to build for ourselves little refuges that will hold nobody else: we are called to far-sightedness, a large conception of men and things and Divine purposes, and to such a calculation of the action of the forces of

the universe as will save us from needless trouble and assure us of ultimate defence and protection. Foresight is everywhere taught in the Bible, but not a foresight that is of the nature of selfishness. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Contrast of prudence and folly*.—A celebrated commander had returned from a period of military service distinguished by the most important victories. After he had retired from a very gratifying reception at court, the sovereign was eloquent in his praise to the surrounding circle. "It must be confessed," said one of the bystanders, "that he is a lucky general." "He has been too long a lucky general, to be only a lucky general," was the apt reply of the discriminating monarch. The same judgment is continually, though silently, made in the ordinary concerns of life. Do we see any one, possessed of the same external advantages and means of wealth with those around him, yet invariably involved in difficulty, poverty, and want? We usually consider him deficient in that prudent foresight which guards against loss, and in that steady industry which leads so commonly to success. The systematically unfortunate very commonly incur the blame of being systematically imprudent. **I. THE CHARACTER OF A PRUDENT MAN.** 1. It is, then, one characteristic of the prudent man that he foreseeth the evil. The faculty of combining present situation with future prospect, and of weighing the good or evil of the one by its effect and bearing upon the other, is a gift by which man is broadly distinguished from the brute creation; and by which intellect and civilisation, among those of his own species, assert their superiority over the narrow views and unreflecting sensuality of savage life. The prudent man walks by faith, and not by sight. Eager to avoid the evil and choose the good; anticipating the punishment of obdurate sin or unreflecting indifference, he asks in the anxious solicitude of one who knows that life and death are on the issue, "What must I do to be saved?" 2. He foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself. The sense of danger leads him at once to the effectual remedy. Whither, then, does the wise man flee from impending danger? Even to the sure and certain hope of his Redeemer's Cross. **II. THE SIMPLE PASS ON, AND ARE PUNISHED.** Is this, it may be asked, that godly simplicity and sincerity which our Lord; and His apostles, and every part of the instruction of the Word of life continually recommend? No: it is the simplicity of folly, of carelessness, of prejudice, of wilfulness, of the love of sin, of unbelief, of ignorance, of hardness of heart, and of contempt of the Word of God. Promises animate not his obedience. Threatenings arouse him not from his lethargy. Warnings awake him not from his security. Expostulation fails to enkindle his shame, or to give life to his gratitude. The simple "pass on." They are carried down the stream of time, silently and surely, toward death and judgment. (*R. P. Buddicom, M.A.*)

Ver. 4. By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life.—Humility recommended.—Every being pursues its own perfection, and would fain be satisfied in all the capacities it understands, and in all the importunate appetites it feels. God draws us insensibly to virtue and obedience, by annexing those good things which we all perceive, admire, and prosecute to the practice of those moral duties which are equally our happiness, but not so easily discerned. The text encourages humility, from the consideration of the great advantages we may reasonably expect from the practice of it, even all that is good and desirable in this present world—both riches, and honour, and life. **I. A DUTY RECOMMENDED.** Humility, with the fear of the Lord. The definition, nature, and principles of humility in general. Humility is a habit or temper of mind, proceeding from a principle of religion, which subdues all lofty, false opinions of one's self, and disposes a man to cheerful acquiescence in all estates and conditions of life that God shall place him in. It is a habit of mind, a frame or temper of soul; for a virtue cannot be defined by single actions. It is such a habit of soul as must be framed and wrought by a principle of religion or the fear of God. Nothing can be a virtue in us that we have not chosen. Mere depression of mind is not humility. Christian humility consists in a modest, just opinion of ourselves, and a cheerful submission to the will of God. **II. THE SEVERAL PARTS AND EXERCISES OF THE DUTY SO DEFINED.** The principal exercises of humility are—1. In our desires and aims. 2. In our looks and gestures. 3. In our garb and habit. But principally—4. In our conversation with our acquaintance, friends, and equals; with our superiors; with our inferiors. **III. THE REWARDS PROPOSED TO PERSUADE AND ENCOURAGE THE PRACTICE OF IT.** 1. Riches, and honour, and life are real blessings, and the proper matter of reward. 2. Humility, with the fear of the Lord, will certainly procure them. They that seek God may expect to attain these rewards, by a natural power and efficacy in the

virtue itself. By an efficacy moral, there is something in the practice of humility that disposes kindly to all those several ends. By an efficacy Divine and spiritual, the blessing of God will assist and forward the designs of the humble, and so dispose and order second causes that they shall live in plenty, peace, and honour, to a good old age. Set the example of our blessed Saviour before your eyes, who humbled Himself to death upon the Cross for us. (*J. Lambe.*) *Humility, with fear* :—These two are naturally associated. They are indeed inseparable. Lowliness of spirit is an indispensable characteristic of a religious life. It is in the valley of humiliation that the sinner first meets with God, and comes into a state of reconciliation with Him. The spirit of pride cannot dwell in the same heart with the fear of the Lord. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.—*On the education of youth* :—A strict and virtuous education of youth is absolutely necessary to a man's attainment of that inestimable blessing, that unspeakable felicity, of being serviceable to his God, easy to himself and useful to others in the whole course of his following life. To the proof of this, lay down six propositions. 1. That in the present state of nature there is in every man a certain propensity to vices, or a corrupt principle more or less disposing him to evil, which principle is sometimes called the flesh, sometimes concupiscence, sometimes sensuality, and makes one part of that which we call original sin. 2. That the forementioned propensity of the sensual part, or principle, to vice, being left to itself, will certainly proceed to work, and to exert itself in action; and if not hindered and counteracted will continue to do so, till practice passes into custom and habit, and so by use and frequency comes to acquire a domineering strength in a man's conversation. 3. That all the disorders of the world, and the confusions that disturb persons, families, and whole societies or corporations, proceed from this natural propensity to vice in particular persons, which being thus heightened by habitual practice, runs forth into those several sorts of vice which corrupt and spoil the manners of men. 4. That when the corruption of man's manners by the habitual improvements of this vicious principle comes from personal to be general and universal, so as to diffuse and spread itself over a whole community, it naturally and directly tends to the ruin and subversion of the government where it so prevails. 5. That this ill principle is to be altered and corrected only by discipline, and the infusion of such principles into the rational and spiritual part of man as may powerfully sway his will and affections, by convincing his understanding that the practice of virtue is preferable to that of vice; and that there is a real happiness and honesty in the one, and a real misery, as well as a turpitude, in the other; there being no mending or working upon the sensual part, but by well-principling the intellectual. 6. This discipline and infusion of good principles into the mind, which only can and must work this great happy change upon a man's morals, by counter-working that other sensual and vicious principle, which would corrupt them, can never operate so kindly, so efficaciously, and by consequence, so successfully, as when applied to him in his minority, while his mind is ductile and tender, and so ready for any good impressions. For when he comes once to be in years, and his mind, having been prepossessed with ill-principles, and afterwards hardened with ill practices, grows callous, and scarce penetrable, his case will be then very different, and the success of such applications is very doubtful, if not desperate. It is necessary that the minds of youth should be formed and seasoned with a strict and virtuous and early and preventing education. On three sorts of persons this trust rests—(1) Parents. (2) Schoolmasters. (3) The clergy. (*R. South.*) *The education of children* :—The careful, prudent, and religious education of children hath for the most part a very good influence upon the whole course of their lives. I. WHEREIN DOTH THE GOOD EDUCATION OF CHILDREN CONSIST? 1. In the tender and careful nursing of them. 2. In bringing them to be baptized. 3. In a due care to inform and instruct them in the whole compass of their duty to God and to their neighbour. 4. In a prudent and diligent care to form their lives and manners to religion and virtue. 5. In giving them good example. 6. In wise restraints from that which is evil, by seasonable reproof and correction. 7. In bringing them to be publicly catechised. 8. In bringing them to be confirmed. II. MORE PARTICULAR DIRECTIONS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS WORK. The young have to be trained in the exercise of the following graces and virtues: Obedience, modesty, diligence, sincerity, tenderness, pity, good government of their passions, and of their tongues, to speak truth and to hate lying; to piety and devotion towards God, sobriety and

chastity with regard to themselves, and to justice and charity towards all men. Endeavour to discover the particular temper and disposition of children, that you may suit and apply yourself to it. Endeavour to plant those principles of religion and virtue which are most substantial and likely to have the best influence on the future government of their lives. Check and discourage in them the first beginnings of sin and vice: as soon as ever they appear pluck them up by the roots. Take great heed that the children be not habituated and accustomed to any evil course. Bring them, as soon as they are capable of it, to the public worship of God. Put them upon the exercise and practice of religion and virtue, in such instances as their understanding and age are capable of. Add constant and earnest prayer to God on behalf of your children. III. SOME OF THE MORE COMMON MISCARRIAGES IN THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS DUTY. These may be found in relation to instruction, example, and reproof. There often is too great rigour and severity; at other times too great laxity. It is always mischievous to punish while under the influence of passion. IV. SHOW HOW GOOD EDUCATION COMES TO BE OF SO GREAT ADVANTAGE. It gives religion and virtue the advantage of the first possession, and the further advantage of habit and custom. V. STIR UP THOSE WHOSE DUTY THIS IS TO DISCHARGE IT WITH GREAT CARE AND CONSCIENCE. Good education is the very best inheritance you can leave your children. In this way you promote your own comfort and happiness. The surest foundation of the public welfare and happiness is laid in the good education of children. Consider the great evils consequent on the neglect of this duty. (*T. Tillotson, D.D.*) *Training up children to the primary virtues*:—Habits of virtue are of the same nature with dexterity in the mechanical or other arts. Would we acquire this dexterity, we must exercise ourselves early and constantly whether in the virtues or the arts. It is necessary for us to train up children to virtue with all possible care from their earliest infancy, and continually to exercise them in it, if we would have them truly virtuous persons. To do this we should find out their temperament, and conduct ourselves accordingly: we should habituate them to act from principle and design; we should teach them to be attentive to the consequences of their actions; we should strive to make their duty their pleasure. Further rules are—1. Inure them from their earliest infancy to obedience and submission. 2. Inspire them with a predominant love for truth, for sincerity and frankness. 3. Train them to diligence, to method, and to industry in their affairs. 4. Be very careful to bring them up to humility and modesty. 5. Endeavour to inspire them with a sincere affection and hearty good-will towards all mankind, without distinction of rank, of religion, of country, or of outward fortune. 6. Neglect not to train them to compassion and benevolence. 7. Train them to patience in sufferings, to fortitude and courage in misfortune, to a steady and intrepid behaviour in all situations. These qualities and virtues are indispensably necessary to us in our present state. We must learn first to practise them in trivial matters if we would do so afterwards in riper years and more important emergencies. (*G. J. Zollikofer.*) *Child-training*:—Introduction: 1. Mobility needed in subject of training; therefore man is born "a child." Yet be aware, flexibility passes, tendency to solidify soon creeps in. 2. Parents here granted right of loving dogmatism: "in the way they should go." I. TRUE TRAINING EMBRACES CARE AND SYSTEM. 1. These should touch each part of child-nature: flesh and blood. Evolution of full manhood only reached thus. Bodies are fed and "trained." Mystery is, the soul often neglected. No animal neglects its young as man does. "Every home should be its own Sabbath-school." 2. Can't train without a line to go on—a faith that can be taught—a system. Trained child not found where father's mind is dark or chaotic. You like your child to choose its faith when it can think for itself? No child is mentally or spiritually free from bias. Child has all to learn. Has no standard of selection. First trainer has greatest power, whether good or evil. Mark this: if you don't bias it for good a thousand tutors outside your home will bias it to its hurt. II. TRAIN CHILD TO DECIDE MORAL QUESTIONS BY PRINCIPLE, NOT BY FEELING. 1. A child is composed of appetites and moral sense. These all glow. But appetites get two or three years' start of moral sense. You must be swift in training, or you won't get moral sense to overtake appetite. 2. Every day of life offer times for moral decision. Think of George Eliot's Arthur Donnithorne; sweet temper, weak moral sense, strong animal tastes; so a standing peril to himself and others. 3. The one grand deciding principle for all souls is: "What does Christ love, that is the thing to be done." It is sure: it carries child to right issues. It is safe: it imperils nothing in its whole being. It is rapid: under it souls grow holy fast. III. TRAIN CHILD TO JUDGE

CHRISTIANITY BY BEST RESULTS. Much of training given unwittingly. Soul-suction always going on in "a child." Five senses are five avenues to soul. Crowds of motley ideas go up them—each idea a teacher. In your home they hear your views of men and actions. Beware! if you condemn Christianity, because of its sullied specimens, you harm the child. Put religion in its highest light. For its sake ask: "What are its finest results?" Show them spiritual splendours. Show them John, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Newton, Hale, Wesley. Christian gallery not wanting in fine portraits. Show them Christ. Moral longing will awaken them; they will hunger and be filled (Matt. v. 6). Conclusion: 1. All details come under these principles. 2. Thus you will train "a godly seed." (*British Weekly*.)

On religious education:—I. AN EXHORTATION TO THE DISCHARGE OF AN IMPORTANT DUTY. The wisdom and propriety of the exhortation are founded on certain qualities inherent in man. 1. Man is remarkably prone to imitation. In private families every action of the parent is imitated by the child. So it happens in the aggregate life of the nation. The cast of general manners depends upon the leaders of society. 2. Children in their infant years contend obstinately for the gratification of their own humour. The principle of self-will is not in cases to be reprehended. When it makes us resolute in spurning compliance with mean conditions, with base proposals, and wicked instigations, it is generous and manly, and should be cherished. But reasonable accommodation of our own inclinations and our own sentiments to the dispositions and opinions of others is absolutely necessary for the transacting of human concerns, and consequently for the existence of civil society. It should therefore be taught to children, because they are inexperienced; and enforced on young persons, because their passions are turbulent. The training of children in the way of subjection to discreet and moderate control is an act of judicious kindness in every parent. 3. When we are born we bring with us minds already furnished with methodical principles; but through the sole gift of God we are endowed with capacity either for the inventing or the learning of arts and sciences. The extent to which this capacity becomes advantageous depends in a great measure on the degree and manner of culture with which it is improved. 4. In the generality of men there is an active spirit which is impatient of rest, and which will find itself employment. Children therefore need training in the proper methods of spending energy in labour and in recreation. 5. There is in man a most unhappy tendency to do evil. Man finds it more easy to indulge his appetites than to raise his soul to higher objects. The best friend of the child is he who begins with the first dawn of understanding to impress on the mind of his child that there is a God everywhere present in power and knowledge, and another state of existence, where goodness shall terminate in happiness, but vice be productive of misery. II. THE EFFECT WHICH WILL ENSUE FROM EARLY CARE EMPLOYED IN EDUCATION. The mental faculties most distinguishable in our first years are memory and imagination. If the proper effects of right instruction are not so visible as might be wished at every period of our age, let no one hastily conclude that therefore the elements of education are totally obliterated. Good principle may for some years lie dormant in the mind. Unless in cases of extreme depravity, the good principle, like the good seed, will at last find its way to shoot up, and give a tenfold measure of increase after its own kind. The training, then, of children in the way they should go is from the nature of man indispensably necessary. (*G. J. Huntingford, D.D.*)

Of the duty which parents owe to their children:—I. THE HEINOUS NATURE AND FATAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEGLECT OF PARENTAL DUTY. 1. As it appears in the sight of God. 2. As it affects the children. 3. As it affects parents themselves. II. HOW PARENTS SHOULD EDUCATE THEIR CHILDREN. 1. Train your children to revere you. 2. Train them to implicit submission to your authority. Insubordination in youth is the certain inlet to all that is disorderly in riper years. 3. In order to train your children to moderation in pleasure, lead them, as early as possible, to mark the imposture of passion, and guard them from all intimacy with the loose and the dissipated, and interdict them of all loose and licentious reading. 4. Train them to industry and frugality. Unremitting application and assiduity are the only means by which pre-eminence among men can be attained. 5. Train your children to virtue and candour, and justice and humanity. 6. Train your children to piety. True views of the benignity of the Ruler of nature will impress their susceptible breast with the feelings of genuine piety, and lead them to love the Lord their God with all their heart and strength and mind. (*W. Thornton*.) *The formation of the minds of children*:—1. Repress not their curiosity and their inquisitiveness. It is in itself no

fault. It is rather a strong impulse and an excellent means to become intelligent and wise. 2. Accustom your children or your pupils to the use of their senses; teach them to apprehend justly. 3. Beware of giving them false or not sufficiently precise ideas of any matter, though of never so trifling import. 4. Set them to learn nothing which, either on account of their tender age or from the want of other kinds of knowledge necessary to that purpose, they cannot comprehend. Measure not their capacities by yours. 5. Endeavour not only to increase and extend their knowledge, but likewise to render it solid and sure. It is far better for them to know a few things thoroughly than to have only a superficial acquaintance with many. 6. Guard them from being hasty in forming conclusions, and avail yourself of all opportunities for leading them, by observations, to circumspection and precision in their inferences and judgments. (*G. J. Zollikofer.*) *The formation of the hearts of children:*—To form the hearts of children means to direct their appetites and affections to the worthiest objects, to inspire them with a predominant love for all that is true and right and proper, and thereby to render the performance of their duty easy and pleasant to them.

1. Study to find out their temperament, and conduct yourself according to it. The temperament is, as it were, the soil that is to be cultivated, and the diversity of this soil is not so great but it may soon be discovered. More or less vivacity and quickness of apprehension, more or less sensibility to good and evil, to pleasure and pain, more or less vehemence in the affections, more or less disposition to rest or to activity—in these consist the principal diversity in what may be called the temperament of children. All these various temperaments may equally lead either to the virtues or to the vices.

2. Accustom them to act from principle and design, and not by blind impulse or mere self-will. 3. But be not satisfied with teaching them to act from reason, as rational creatures; but teach them to act upon the noblest principles, and in pure and beneficent views. Beware of setting only their ambition in motion, and of inciting them to application and duty from no other motive than the idea of the judgment that others pass on them. 4. Teach them, further, to attend to the consequences of their actions or of their behaviour. Teach them duly to prize that inward peace, the satisfaction, the cheerfulness of mind, the health and strength of body, and the other advantages which they have derived from honest and proper conduct. 5. Strive to make their duty a pleasure to them. 6. For facilitating all this to them, for teaching them to act upon principle, to act from the best motives, and to be attentive to the consequences of their actions, you should accustom them betimes to self-examination, which is the most excellent means for constantly becoming more wise and virtuous. 7. Teach them, in like manner, to reap benefit from the conduct of other persons. 8. Finally, to this end call history likewise to your aid. (*Ibid.*)

Advantages of good training:—They who are well educated generally behave well for the following reasons: 1. Early impressions are deep. 2. Habit is strong. 3. Early piety is acceptable to God. The first love of an innocent heart is a sacrifice of a sweet savour. (*S. Charters.*) *Religious training:*—A child may be said to be taught when in words we clearly convey to his mind any truth or

enjoin upon his conscience any precept. He is trained when we ourselves so pass before him, in practical illustration of the truth and precept, that he is drawn along after us in the same way. The principle applies peculiarly to moral and religious instruction. Suppose you wish to instruct a child in benevolence or charity. You tell him what it inclines one to do for the needy and suffering; you dilate upon the beautiful sentiments which the exercise of it incites in one's own breast; you refer to distinguished examples of it that have blessed the world. All this is teaching. But now, again, you take your child by the hand, and lead him with you into some abode of poverty and want; you let him see with you the necessitous situation of the inmates of that cold and ill-provided dwelling; he marks the yearning of your heart towards them, and his heart swells in sympathy; the satisfaction that exhilarates your soul he shares as you freely give the needed aid; he witnesses the whole reciprocal action of a living bounty on your part and a returning gratitude on the spot. And this is training. One such scene will avail more than many lectures to make your child charitable. Or suppose, again, you would instruct your child in devotion, prayer to God. But to what purpose if the child is not moreover trained to pray?—to what purpose if the very house he lives in is a prayerless house? Would you instruct your child in that cardinal excellence of truth? You insist often, in words, on its importance. But, more than this, train it to do so. You rebuke deception. It is well. But practise not in any way what you rebuke. Would we instruct our children to be kind and gentle? How?

by a command? Not so only, but more powerfully by the affectionate and pleasant bearing and tone of our own speech and person. Parents and friends often wonder that, after all the pains taken with children, the frequent counsels and admonitions, they should yet afterwards go astray. But was the child who has disappointed you trained as well as taught? Did you uniformly go before to beckon and lead him after in the way you first pointed out? But in the majority of cases the rule will hold good: your child will keep on as he has been trained. The soldier in his age might as soon forget the drill of his early discipline, or the sailor the first calculations by which, under the rolling planets, he made his way over the uncertain waves, as your child the practical guidance to which you have actually used him through a series of years. He will keep on, if you have been his leader and forerunner, when your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and will run the race after very much as you have run it before. The chief significance of the grave where you lie down will be to fix the direction in which you trained and the point at which you left your child. Your bark will disappear as it sails on over the misty horizon; but his bark shall hold the same course. Whither, whither shall it be? (*C. A. Bartol.*)

The education of the young:—I. AN INTERESTING OBJECT. "A child." 1. Its personal powers (*Job xxxii. 8*), the faculties of the mind. 2. Its social importance. 3. Its possible elevation. 4. Its total depravity. Socrates confessed of himself that his natural inclinations were exceedingly bad, but by philosophy he overruled them. 5. Its immortal duration. II. AN IMPORTANT DUTY. "Train up." 1. Let him be taught useful learning. 2. Let him be instructed in religious knowledge. 3. Let him be impressed by a consistent example. 4. Let him be guided into proper habits. 5. Let him be sanctified by earnest prayer. III. AN ENCOURAGING PROSPECT. 1. From the Divine appointment (*Deut. iv. 10, xxxi. 13; Eph. vi. 4*). 2. From the Divine procedure. (*Studies for the Pulpit.*)

*The religious instruction of the young:—*1. See to it that we present the Divine character in a manner calculated to encourage young hearts. 2. Distinguish between the way in which death affects the body and the way in which it affects the spirit. 3. Make it clear that the religion of Christ is in harmony with all innocent recreation and enjoyment. 4. Do all in our power to interest the young in the services of the sanctuary. 5. See that you offer to the young the truth which God has revealed to you, and of which you have felt the power. 6. Avoid all treatment of the young that is calculated to dispirit and discourage. Be careful not to exact too much from them. 7. Be varied in your teaching, and do not be depressed if the attainment of your object is delayed. (*S. D. Hillman.*)

*The necessity of a wise and wholesome discipline:—*1. As soon as children are capable of reflection endeavour to make them acquainted with some of the leading truths of the gospel. 2. Explain the duties of practical religion as well as the articles of belief. 3. Be careful to set before your children an example worthy of imitation, for instructions and exhortations will be invalidated by inconsistency. 4. Discipline, reproof, and correction are necessary in the family as well as in the Church and State. 5. Let correction and reproof be accompanied with fervent and importunate prayer. 6. Keep a watchful eye over them to see what may be the fruit of your labour. To rightly perform parental duties we must begin betimes; secure the affection of the children; keep them out of the way of temptation; and instruct them with gentleness. (*B. Beddome.*)

*Godly training:—*The various branches of godly training may be thus enumerated: 1. Instruction in right principles—the principles of God's Word. 2. The inculcation of right practice—the practice of God's will. 3. Salutary admonition and restraint, and correction. 4. The careful avoidance of exposure to evil company and evil example. 5. The exhibition before them of a good example in ourselves. 6. Constant, believing, and earnest prayer. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Education:—I. WHOM SHOULD WE EDUCATE? The material. "A child." The world teems with anomalies both real and obvious, whereby the moralist may enforce the duty of educating in the comparatively pliable period of youth. II. THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION. "Train up." Note the distinction between teaching and training. There may be teaching without training. Moral training according to a Divine standard, with the view of moulding the human being while yet young and tender into right principles and habits of action, is the only education worthy of the name. The oldest training-school is the best—the school at home; sisters and brothers are the best class-fellows, and parents the best masters. But formidable obstacles, both intrinsic and extrinsic, prevent or impede parental training. III. THE AIM AND END OF

EDUCATION. "In the way he should go." Wisdom in choosing the proper time, and skill in adopting the best method, would be of no avail if false principles were thereby instilled into the mind and evil habits ingrafted on the life. If we do not train the children in truth and righteousness it would be better that we should not train them at all. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *The training of children*.—There are many qualifications necessary for carrying out this important duty. I. SANCTIFIED LOVE. This is not mere instinctive fondness which is common to man and animals, but—1. A perception of the true beauty of childhood. 2. A realisation of the purity of childhood. 3. A consciousness of the guileless simplicity of childhood. II. FELT RESPONSIBILITY. 1. Children are not our own. 2. Children are the future inhabitants of the world. Hence the world will be, to a certain extent, what we make the children. 3. Children have immortal souls. III. INDIRECT INFLUENCE. To obtain this we must—1. Subdue our own passion. No passionate parent can possibly influence his child for good. 2. Set a godly example. 3. Cultivate confidence and win affection. IV. PATIENT WAITING AND EARNEST PRAYER. (*Homilist.*) *Childhood innocence a dream*.—Here is an assertion, but is not experience frequently at variance with it? The statement of the text is unqualified. Adherence to the right path is given as the invariable result of having been trained up in the right path. Can this be established by facts? With what restrictions are the words of the wise man to be understood? It is implied in the text that there is no tendency in a child to walk in the right way, and if we leave him to himself he will be sure to walk in the wrong. Almost from the moment of the child's birth can be discovered in the infant the elements of the proud, revengeful, self-willed man. There is hereditary guilt where there cannot be absolute. The innocence of childhood is a dream and delusion. In dealing with children we have not to deal with unoccupied soil, but soil already impregnated with every seed of moral evil. In what manner may the precept of the text be best obeyed? The great secret of training lies in regarding the child as immortal. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *Teach the youngest*.—Dr. Chalmers, in a letter to his sister, Mrs. Morton, says: "You cannot begin too early. God should be spoken of to the very youngest, and the name of Jesus Christ familiarised to them; and every association of reverence and love that the tone and style of the parents can attach to the business of religion should be established in them. Their consciences are wonderfully soon at work." *Childhood injured*.—Childhood is like a mirror catching and reflecting images all around it. Remember that an impious thought uttered by a parent's lip may operate upon a young heart like a careless spray of water thrown upon polished steel, staining it with rust which no after-scouring can efface. *Teaching and training*.—It is a very important thing to get hold of the distinction between teaching and training, or, as the margin reads it, catechising. Train up a child, not merely lead a child. There is a New Testament text which brings out the same thoughts where parents are taught to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Observe the distinction between nurture and admonition. Admonition means teaching, and nurture means training—two very remote things. Eli was a capital admonisher, but no trainer. Eli admonished his sons very often. If mere talking would have answered, he would have done well. He should have been like Abraham, who commanded his house after him. Do you think you could ever make good marksmen by giving lectures on the science of projectiles? Would that make men good shots? If you are to be good shots you must handle the rifle and actually shoot. (*S. Coley.*) *The training of a child*.—Human society is now hard enough, and needs more sympathy in it than one always sees; but what it would become if the hearts of men were not kept in some degree of softness and tenderness by the affections which are raised and developed by family life it is difficult fully to conceive. This text corrects the terrible and mischievous misconception that a child's future is altogether a thing of chance. It can be controlled. All life can be trained. It can be made to take a course different from that which it otherwise would take. The training is within certain limits. Children will be trained in spite of us. How they are trained depends largely on us. We rely on this same principle of training in every other relation which the child sustains. The laws of religious life are not capricious and incalculable laws. Duty has to be learned like a business, or a science, or a profession. The training of a child consists in—1. Teaching. 2. Example. 3. Discipline. 4. Prayer. Show me a child well instructed in the truths of the gospel, living day by day in the presence of consistent and winning examples, and surrounded with prayers, and I do not say that

such an one may not through a strange self-will break his way through all these blessed influences and become a wreck and a castaway, but it will be a wonder if he comes to such a melancholy end, and it is easier to believe that in such a case the training has been faulty than that there has been a failure in the Divine promise which connects the spring and the autumn. (*Enoch Mellor, D.D.*) *The training of children*:—The whole human family has descended from the loins of Adam, and is necessarily tainted with his impurity. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." We are all under the power of sin. This tendency to sin is often exhibited in the child long before the dawn of consciousness. It is constitutionally a sinner, and the uninterrupted development of its nature will necessarily be a growth in sin. I. THE TEXT DOES NOT MEAN THAT THIS SINFUL NATURE IS TO BE TRAINED IN THE HOPE OF PRODUCING BLESSED RESULTS, BUT SOMETHING HIGHER AND BETTER IS TO BE SUPPLIED FROM WITHOUT. Life and grace and power have been brought into the service of humanity in the person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and are to be made over to us by the operation of the Holy Ghost. But this Divine life is here only in germ, and must be developed in the midst of certain conditions, and here is a duty that God requires at the hands of parents. "I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him, and that they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken of him." Here it is expressly stated that Abraham was to do his part in order that the Lord might verify to him the blessings guaranteed in the covenant. II. THIS TRAINING SHOULD BEGIN AT THE VERY DAWN OF THE CHILD'S EXISTENCE. When we are told to "train up a child in the way that he should go," it is meant that we should do this; not let it first grow up in sin and then try to reclaim it afterward by extraordinary effort. To do that is to give the world, the flesh, and the devil all the advantage. The child will not grow up a Christian without the influence and teaching of the parent. The receptive faculties of the child must be trained and sustained, and then the Holy Ghost will sanctify the life and make it fruitful in holiness. During its earliest life the child absorbs impressions and is completely under parental influence and direction. Parents are also invested with authority over the child, and it will need discipline, but this must be exercised in love. For the lack of this spirit corrections administered are often of no avail. Correction administered in a wrong spirit will do harm and not good. It must be evident, therefore, that properly to train our children we must not only teach them Christian doctrine, but we must live the life of a Christian. III. IF A CHILD IS THUS NURTURED AND TRAINED IN THE DIVINE LIFE WE NEED NOT SUPPOSE THAT A TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE OR SUDDEN TRANSITION IS NECESSARY TO CONSTITUTE IT A CHRISTIAN. The neglect of parental training cannot be made up in any other way. There is no danger of claiming too much for our holy religion. The whole being of man is to be sanctified by it. The chief end of our existence is to glorify God. How often it is said of a man who dies owning no property that "he left nothing to his family"! But every child is an heir, and his inheritance is indefeasible. First of all are his memories of his parents and his home. The man who has no property to devise should not be unhappy. "I give and bequeath to my children a good name, a Christian example, and a faithful training." Is not that a good start for a last will? These are legacies over which no heirs quarrel and that require no probate outside of the sanctuary of the heart. (*E. R. Eschbeck, D.D.*)

Ver. 7. The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.—*The borrower servant to the lender*:—The mere circumstance of being rich gives one man superiority over another who is poor. He who is forced to borrow is placed on that very account in a sort of relative inferiority to him whose position enables him to lend. These words may be compared with those attributed to the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." I. THE PRINCIPLE MAY BE UNIVERSALLY ACKNOWLEDGED AND ACTED UPON. Though a man may have received much—a vigorous intellect, a commanding judgment, a rich imagination—he will be miserable if he can give nothing. If a man were assured that he would never be permitted to tell what he had done or recite what he had seen, he loses at once the great impetus which urges him to do much or to see much. A man is not satisfied with being rich, he must be in circumstances to give; some one must be a borrower, while he is a lender. It is the giving which makes the receiving of any worth. What is the reason of this alleged supremacy of giving over receiving? 1. The resemblance which is thus acquired to our Redeemer and Creator. If God

be love, there is no presumption in supposing that without objects over which the love might expand the Almighty Himself would have remained unsatisfied. Lending, not borrowing, constitutes the happiness of God. And there is more like-mindedness to Christ in giving than in receiving. 2. The giver or the lender has necessarily an advantage over the receiver or the borrower, and this explains how the one is the servant of the other. In all cases the giving seems to imply a relative superiority and the receiving a relative inferiority. 3. Notice the reflex character of benevolence which causes that whatever is bestowed is restored to us tenfold. II. OBJECTIONS URGED AGAINST THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. In dividing society into the lenders and the borrowers you would exclude the vast majority of mankind from the possibility of being charitable. But being charitable is not limited to any class of society. The poor man may be a giver as well as the rich. God has not granted to the wealthy a monopoly of benevolence. (*H. Melville, B.D.*) *A wholesome horror of debt*.—The venerable Peter Cooper of New York, whose philanthropic efforts for the elevation of the masses are well known throughout the United States, celebrated his ninety-first birthday. In conversation with a reporter who congratulated him, Mr. Cooper referred to some of the guiding principles to which he attributed his success in life. Among other weighty observations were the following remarks on the burden of debt which are worthy the attention of all, especially of young men. Mr. Cooper said: "When I was twenty-one years old my employer offered to build me a shop and set me up in business, but as I always had a horror of being burdened with debt, and having no capital of my own, I declined his kind offer. He himself became a bankrupt. I have made it a rule to pay for everything as I go. If, in the course of business, anything is due from me to any one and the money is not called for, I make it my duty on the last Saturday before Christmas to take it to his business place."

Ver. 8. *He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity.*—*The husbandry and harvest of the wicked*.—I. WHAT IS IT TO SOW INIQUITY? or, to "sow to the flesh"? To follow only such a kind of life as a man's own carnal and corrupt humour leads unto. It is called "sowing" because—1. Before sowing goes the dressing and manuring of the ground; and men make themselves ready beforehand to do evil. 2. Ploughing and sowing are accompanied with much industry. And great is the diligence of the ungodly in the furtherance of iniquity. 3. Sowing, though laborious, is full of contentment. And the ungodly find joy in doing naughtily. 4. In sowing there go many seeds together, one handful after another. In the lives of the wicked there are plenty of evils; they never go alone—one maketh way for another. 5. After sowing the ground is harrowed, and the seed covered. So when evil is entertained in the heart, what policy there is to secrete it. Sowing iniquity is discerned by these signs: 1. A cherishing and encouraging the heart to evil. 2. A taking pains to do naughtily. 3. A delighting in wickedness. 4. A heaping of one sin on the neck of another. 5. A plotting for the bringing of evil to perfection. 6. A withstanding of all means tending to recovery. II. WHAT ARE THE TROUBLES WHICH FOLLOW ON THIS SOWING OF INIQUITY? The affliction here meant is either in this life or hereafter. That which is in this life is either outward or inward. Diseases, discredit, &c. A conscience full of inward vexation; and sometimes a reprobate mind. The term "reap" indicates the fulness and certainty of the affliction. Two points of doctrine taught—1. The greatness of God's patience. 2. The certainty of His justice. (*S. Hieron.*) *Wild oats*.—"He that soweth iniquity shall reap calamity" (*R.V.*). The fashion of never calling a spade a spade is known as "euphemism." According to it death is paying the debt of nature, stealing is misappropriation, lying is prevarication. A trace of it is found in the expression, "sowing one's wild oats." The phrase is intended to comprehend pretty much all the vices of young manhood. We are all sowing something or other. Some sow the fine wheat of kindly lives and generous deeds. Others go heedlessly sowing the wind. It would be well, all around, if there were less of sentimentalism and more of sound common sense with respect to the follies of our fast young men. Never were two greater mistakes made than are embodied in these two excuses, "Boys will be boys," and "He'll live it down; I'm sure he'll live it down." Paul directs our attention to the two levels of life—the low level of the flesh; the higher level of the spirit, where are men who live not for themselves only, but for the good of others and the glory of God. For all who are building character and making their lives tell for truth and righteousness, there are three safeguards—conscience, the sense of honour, and faith. There is no hope that the

vicious young man will live his evil down. Sin works a terrible damage. It rots one's self-respect; it pollutes the memory. It indisposes the soul for better things. It enslaves in the fetters of habit. It ruins the body. It destroys the soul. But no matter what the mistakes of our past lives have been, if we repent the Lord is ready to forgive. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Human life*:—I. THE INEVITABLE WORK OF HUMAN LIFE. What is the work? It is that of moral agriculture—sowing and reaping. Every man in every act of life is doing this. Every volition, whether it takes the form of a thought, a word, or a muscular act, is a seed. There is a germ of imperishable life in it. What seeds men sow every day. What bushels they deposit in the moral soil of their being. But they reap as well as sow every day. What was sown yesterday they reap to-day. "Men are living in the fruits of their doings." The law of causation is inviolate and ever operative within them. II. THE RETRIBUTIVE LAW OF HUMAN LIFE. What you sow you'll reap. 1. What you sow in kind you reap. "He that soweth iniquity shall reap vanity." Job says, "They that plough iniquity and sow wickedness reap the same" (Job iv. 8). Paul (Gal. vi. 7, 8). God will not reverse the law. 2. What you sow in measure you shall reap. Not a grain will be lost. Sometimes the seed which the husbandman commits to the soil rots. But not a grain in the harvest of life is lost. He will reap the richest harvest of blessedness who is most active in deeds of love and godliness. The words present—III. THE TERRIBLE MISTAKE OF HUMAN LIFE. What is the mistake? "Sowing iniquity." 1. This is a general mistake. 2. This is a mistake which men are slow to learn. 3. This is a mistake whose ultimate consequences will be terrific. "And the rod of his anger shall fail"; or, as in the margin, "With the rod of his anger shall he be consumed." Perhaps this expression refers to the tyrannic power exercised by wealthy men, as referred to in the preceding verse. Death shall wrest the rod from his hands. God shall break it to pieces; and his tyranny and iniquity shall leave him nothing but shame, remorse, and the fruits of Divine vengeance. (*Homilist.*) *Sowing wild oats*:—In all the wide range of accepted British maxims there is none, take it for all in all, more thoroughly abominable than that "a young man must sow his wild oats." Look at it on what side you will, and you can make nothing but a devil's maxim of it. What a man—be he young, old, or middle-aged—sows, that, and nothing else, shall he reap. The one only thing to do with wild oats is to put them carefully into the hottest part of the fire, and get them burnt to dust, every seed of them. If you sow them, no matter in what ground, up they will come, with long, tough roots like couch-grass, and luxuriant stalks and leaves, as sure as there is a sun in heaven—a crop which it turns one's heart cold to think of. The devil, too, whose special crop they are, will see that they thrive; and you, and nobody else, will have to reap them; and no common reaping will get them out of the soil, which must be dug down deep again and again. Well for you if, with all your care, you can make the ground sweet again by your dying day. "Boys will be boys" is not much better, but that has a true side to it; but this encouragement to the sowing of wild oats is simply devilish, for it means that a young man is to give way to the temptations and follow the lusts of his age. What are we to do with the wild oats of manhood and old age—with ambition, overreaching, the false weights, hardness, suspicion, avarice—if the wild oats of youth are to be sown, and not burnt? What possible difference can we draw between them? If we may sow the one, why not the other? (*Tom Hughes.*)

Ver. 9. He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed.—*The bountiful eye*:—The passage before us speaks of bounty in man, and blessedness from God. What is a bountiful eye, and what is the blessing belonging to him who possesses it? The eye is a wonderful part of the curiously wrought human frame. But the term is used in Scripture in a moral point of view, and describes a peculiar state of the mind. Thus we read of the blinded eye, the enlightened eye, the single eye, the evil eye, all of which refer to the state of the mind or heart; and so does the term "bountiful eye." Mind, it is not said a bountiful tongue—"most men will proclaim every one his own goodness" (chap. xx. 6); nor a bountiful hand, for man may give all his goods to feed the poor, and lack charity (1 Cor. xiii. 3); nor a bountiful head, for an ingenious mind may devise schemes of liberality for others and not be truly generous himself; but "a bountiful eye"—one through which the soul looks in tender compassion—one that "considers the cause of the poor" (Psa. xli. 1)—one that compares and contrives—one that "affects the heart," stirs it up to feel, and moves the hand to minister. Such an eye looks in the right

place to find appropriate objects. It does not shun misery, "passing by" (like the priest and Levite) "on the other side." It looks through the right medium, even the love and compassion of God, and says, "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" It looks to the right end, even the glory of God and the good of man; and looks for a right reward—not the approbation of man, but to please God. A bountiful eye does not say, "How much can I give to save appearances, or pacify conscience"; but, "How much can I spare God and His cause?" A bountiful eye may be considered in contrast with the evil eye. "Eat not the bread of him that hath an evil eye" (chap. xxiii. 6). Why not? Such an one maketh haste to be rich (chap. xxviii. 22). He attempts to serve God and mammon (Matt. vii. 12). Thus his eye is evil, and his whole body is full of darkness. Have you a bountiful eye? Be careful of it. The eye of the body wants guarding; so does the eye of the soul. It sometimes grows dim. Covetousness steals silent marches even on liberal souls. Happy is he of whom it can be said spiritually, as of Moses literally, that his eye is not dim, nor his spiritual force abated. The way to strengthen the habit is to be frequent in the act. (*Christian Treasury.*)

Ver. 10. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease.—*The scorner* :—The scorner is a character which Solomon has frequently called our attention to in preceding chapters. Few characters in society are more despicable in spirit or pernicious in influence. I. AS A SOCIAL DISTURBER. "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall cease." 1. He is a disturber in the family. 2. He is a disturber in the Church. 3. He is a disturber in the nation. II. AS A SOCIAL OUTCAST. "Cast out the scorner." Excommunication is his righteous doom. If he has gained great influence as a politician, governments sometimes, instead of casting him out, take him into office, and bribe him by voting him a princely income. The duty, however, of society towards the scorner is to expel him. He should be treated as a social pest. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend.—*Purity* :—What is purity—this bright and blessed strength of human life? The foundation of all purity must rest upon the body. Without bodily purity no other form of purity is possible. On this must rise the structure of mental and spiritual purity. Our thoughts and words must be not less pure than our actions. Action is ripened thought, and thought is germinating action. "No man suddenly falls." The thoughts have grown accustomed to dwell on impurity long before the deed of impurity is committed. In pureness of mind lies our best defence. And purity of mind is essential to clearness of spiritual vision and lofty exaltation of soul. The vision of the Invisible is impossible to the impure. And the beatific vision of God should be man's noblest ambition. Practical suggestions: 1. Cleanliness is a strong defence of bodily purity, and with this must go good moral habits. 2. Wholesome environment and occupation are strong aids to purity. When the surroundings of life are not wholesome, it is a struggle to keep life pure. 3. Go not into the way of temptation, and avoid the companionship of the impure. 4. Reverence your body. Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost; let us not defile them with impurity. And whatever else you leave undone, yet believe in pure and sacred love. Love that is not pure is not love. The love of home is a splendid defence against impurity. (*Canon Diggle.*) *The grace of the lips* :—I. PURE-HEARTEDNESS. The moral beauty, the moral affluence of it; what it is and what comes out of it; what is a pure-hearted man, and how does his pure-heartedness stand related to his life? The proverb speaks of love for pure-heartedness, a recognition of it, and a joy in it, as the greatest and best of possessions. II. THE OUTCOME OF PURE-HEARTEDNESS. A pure-hearted man will be pure in speech; his conversation will be seasoned with the salt of his pure feeling. Speech is the blossom of a man's life, and is fair or foul, fragrant or offensive, according to the character of the tree. 1. Conversation is the grace of the lips. Not mere religious talk; not prudery—the over-conscientiousness that detects wrong where no wrong is. Over-sensitiveness is not delicacy. 2. Prayer is a grace of the lips that springs from pure-heartedness. 3. The preaching of a pure-hearted man is a grace of the lips. Because of this grace of the lips which springs from purity of heart, special favours shall be won. "The king shall be his friend." Good men win social confidence wherever they are, and the favour of the King of kings. (*Henry Allon.*) *The good man* :—

This passage leads us to consider the heart, the speech, the influence, and the blessedness of a good man. I. THE HEART OF THE GOOD MAN. "He loveth pureness of heart." Not merely does he love the pure in language, in manners and habits, in outward deportment, but the pure in heart. Pureness of heart in man's case implies—1. A moral renewal. 2. An urgent necessity. Without pureness of heart there is no true knowledge of God, or fellowship with Him. II. THE SPEECH OF THE GOOD MAN. "For the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend." By "the grace of his lips" we are to understand something more than grammatic accuracy, or elegant diction—something more than logical correctness or strict veracity. It means speech that is morally pure—pure in sentiment, pure in aim. It is said of Christ that the people wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. The man of a pure heart will have lips of grace. "If the tree is made good, the fruit will be good." III. THE INFLUENCE OF THE GOOD MAN. "The king shall be his friend." Solomon here speaks probably of his own determination. He meant to say that he would give his friendship to such men. "This," says Mr. Bridges, "had been his father's resolution" (Psa. li. 6, cxix. 63). This character smoothed the way to royal favour for Joseph (Gen. xli. 37-45), for Ezra (Ezra vii. 21-25), and Daniel (Dan. vi. 1-3, 28). Nay, we find godly Obadiah in the confidence of wicked Ahab (1 Kings xviii. 3, 12; 2 Kings xiii. 14). So powerful is the voice of conscience, even when God and holiness are hated! Such alone the great King marks as His friends. Such He embraces with His fatherly love (chap. xv. 9). Such He welcomes into His heavenly kingdom (Psa. xv. 1, 2; xxiv. 3, 4). IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF A GOOD MAN. "The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge." Three different interpretations have been given to the expression. 1. That the Lord vigilantly watches over His truth in the world. This is a truth, although we are not disposed to accept it as an interpretation of the passage. 2. That what the eyes of the Lord see He remembers for ever. "The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge." He retains His knowledge. We do not preserve our knowledge. We forget far more than we retain. But we are not disposed to accept this as the idea of the passage. 3. That the Lord exercises a protecting superintendence over those who possess His knowledge. That it means, in fact, the same as the expression elsewhere. "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous." This we accept as the true idea. Whilst the Lord keeps the good man, He overthroweth the words of the transgressor. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 13. **The slothful man saith, There is a lion without.—One lion; two lions; no lion at all:**—This slothful man seems to cherish that one dread of his about the lions as if it were his favourite aversion and he felt it to be too much trouble to invent another excuse. Perhaps he hugs it to his soul all the more because it is a home-born fear, conjured up by his own imagination. At any rate, it serves him as a passable excuse for laziness, and that is what he wants. When a man is slothful as a servant he is unjust to his employers; and when he is in business on his own account, idleness is usually a wrong to his wife and family. When a man is thoroughly eaten up with the dry-rot of laziness he generally finds some kind of excuse, though his crime is really inexcusable. We have many spiritual sluggards, and it is to them that I speak. They are not sceptics, or confirmed infidels, or opposers of the gospel: perhaps their sluggish nature saves them from anything like energetic opposition to goodness. 1. **The sluggard's tongue is not slothful.** The man who is lazy all over is generally busy with his tongue. There are no people that have so much to say as those that have little to do. 2. **His imagination also is not idle.** There were no lions in the streets. Laziness is a great lion-maker. He who does little dreams much. His imagination could create a whole menagerie of wild beasts. 3. **He takes great pains to escape from pains.** This slothful man had to use his inventive ability to get himself excused from doing his duty. It is an old proverb that lazy people generally take the most trouble, and so they do; and when men are unwilling to come to Christ, it is very wonderful what trouble they will take to keep away from Him. I. A LION. The man means that there is a great difficulty—a terrible difficulty, quite too much of a difficulty for him to overcome. He has not the strength to attack this dreadful enemy; the terrible difficulty which he foresees is more than he can face. The real lion after all is sluggishness itself, aversion to the things of God. II. **Two LIONS.** In the second text there are two lions instead of one (chap. xxvi. 13). He has waited because of that one lion, and now he fancies that there are two. He has made a bad bargain of his delay. It was inconvenient then because there was a lion. Is it more con-

venient now? Procrastination never profits; difficulties are doubled, dangers thicken. III. No LION at ALL. If there be a man who would have Christ, there is no lion in the way to prevent his having Christ. "There are a thousand difficulties," says one. If thou desirest Christ truly, there is no effectual difficulty that can really block thee from coming to Him. There are no lions except in your own imagination. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The characteristics of laziness*:—To Solomon laziness was one of the greatest evils in the character of man. How frequently does he depict it with graphic force! How often does he denounce it with firm energy! "Idleness," says Colton, "is the grand pacific ocean of life, and in that stagnant abyss, the most salutary things produce no good, the most obnoxious no evil. Vice, indeed, abstractedly considered, may be, and often is, engendered in idleness; but the moment it becomes sufficiently vice, it must quit its cradle, and cease to be idle." Two of the evils connected with indolence are suggested in the text. I. IT CREATES FALSE EXCUSES. "There is a lion without." "The lion in the streets" is a fiction of his own lazy brain. The slothful man is ever acting thus—1. In the secular sphere. Is he a farmer? He neglects the cultivation of his fields, because the weather is too cold or too hot, too cloudy, too dry or too wet. Is he a tradesman? He finds imaginary excuses in the condition of the market. Commodities are too high or too low. Is he an artizan? He finds difficulties in the place, the tools, or the materials. The industrious farmer finds no difficulties in the weather. 2. In the spiritual sphere. When the unregenerate man is urged to the renunciation of his own principles and habits, and the adoption of new spirit and methods, slothfulness urges him to make imaginary excuses. Sometimes he pleads the decrees of God, sometimes the greatness of his sins, sometimes the inconvenience of the season—too soon or too late. II. IT CREATES UNMANLY EXCUSES. The very excuse he pleads, though imaginary, if true would be a strong reason for immediate action. "A lion in the streets!" Why, if he had a spark of manhood in him, a bit of the stuff that makes heroes, he should rouse every power. There is no heroism in the heart of indolence. To true souls difficulties are a challenge, not a check to action. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 15. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.—*Foolishness and the remedy*:—I. THE EVIL DEPLORED. 1. Of what does this foolishness consist? Wrong wishes, purposes, thoughts, pride, sin, levity, &c. 2. Where does this foolishness lurk? In the heart. Deep in the nature, among the affections. Hidden, secret, for some time unknown. In the heart of a "child," even of a little child. 3. How this foolishness is held in the heart—"bound." Children often hold to their folly with great tenacity; bound with other things, and spoiling what is good, like the thorns that choked the good seed. 4. How this foolishness in the heart shows itself. In evil tempers, in vain murmurings, in ungodly deeds, in wilfulness and obstinacy, &c. 5. The consequences to which, if uncorrected, this foolishness will lead. The forming of a character that men will despise and God hate. The embittering of the present life and the ruin of the life to come. II. THE REMEDY PRESCRIBED. 1. As a general rule correction is needed. 2. Literally, the rod required is often the "whip for the fool's back." It will often accomplish what words will not. 3. It may stand for wholesome discipline of many kinds. Learn—(1) Seek the removal of folly from the heart by thought and prayer. (2) In every correction, remember that it is for our good. (3) Consider that the father who uses the rod does not willingly afflict. (4) Better that folly be driven from us, than that we should be banished from heaven. (*Handbook of S.S. Addresses.*)

Ver. 16. He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches . . . shall surely come to want.—*Avarice*:—I. OPPRESSION. "He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches" (R.V., "gain"). Everywhere do we see avarice working out its designs, and building up its fortunes by oppressing the poor. The poor have necessarily to cross the seas, to delve in mines, to toil in fields, to work in manufactories, to slave in shops and counting-houses. But avarice cares nothing for the health, the liberty, the pleasures, the intellectual and social advancement of the poor. Avarice fattens on the miseries of poverty. The interest of others is nothing to the avaricious man in comparison with his own. He would be ever receptive, never communicative. II. SYCOPHANCY. "He that giveth to the rich." Avarice, whilst tyrannic to the poor, is servile to the rich. The wealth it gets it employs with a miserable, crawling baseness, to win the favour and command the

smiles of the wealthy and the great. A fawning sycophancy will eat out the true manhood of the civilised world. Souls bow down before the glitter of wealth and the pageantry of power. (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 17-21. Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise.—*Spiritual verities* :—I. The experimental knowledge of them is a TRANSCENDENT BLESSING. They are "excellent things" in themselves—things that reveal a spiritual universe, a glorious Redeemer, and an ever-blessed God. But the verses teach that a knowledge of them is a transcendent blessing. They teach—1. That such a knowledge affords pleasure. It is a "pleasant thing." What said Paul? "I count all things but loss for the excellency," &c. 2. That such a knowledge enriches speech. "They shall withal be fitted in thy lips." 3. That such a knowledge inspires trust in God. "That thy trust may be in the Lord." 4. That such a knowledge establishes the faith of the soul. A man to whom these spiritual verities are an experience is not like a feather tossed by every wind of doctrine, but like a tree, so rooted and grounded in faith as to stand firm amidst the fiercest hurricanes that blow. Such a man's faith stands not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. 5. That such a knowledge qualifies for usefulness. "That thou mightest answer the words of truth to them that send unto thee." II. The experimental knowledge of them is ATTAINABLE. The method for attainment involves four things. 1. Communication. These spiritual verities come to the soul in the "words of the wise." "Have not," says the writer of these verses, "I written to thee excellent things in counsels and knowledge?" Men do not reach this knowledge as they reach a knowledge of scientific truth—by their own researches and reasonings. It is brought to them in a communication—a communication from holy men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." 2. Attention. "Bow down thine ear, and hear the words of the wise." 3. Application: "Apply thine heart unto my knowledge." 4. Retention. "It is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 21. That I might make thee know the certainty of the words of truth.—*Certainties* :—This is an age of inquiry. The ideas of the ancient world are the ideas of the childhood of the race. The Bible is a human book, which we reverence and love as a sacred treasure on account of the Divine spirit which pervades it. Do not place the Bible on the altar of superstition and imagine it to be God. Seek God in it, but with this caution—that all of it is not the actual Word of God. Why should any man seek by unfair means to force another to think as he does? Does not Christ give us an example of mental freedom? He seeks the voluntary and unprejudiced consent of mind, heart, and will. I. KNOW THE CERTAINTY OF THE WORDS OF TRUTH. 1. That God is the heavenly Father of mankind. 2. Our heavenly Father is just, merciful, and loving, and every man may have free access to the great parental heart. 3. Never attempt to escape from any penalty by doing wrong. II. WHEREVER THERE IS A PENITENT SOUL THERE IS ALSO A KIND AND FORGIVING GOD. Penitence is not perfection. III. THE TRANSGRESSOR MUST BEAR THE PENALTY OF HIS SIN. It is a just and merciful law of God that the transgressor shall bear the penalty. The Lord Jesus will not save you from the physical penalty of your sin; but He will give you grace to bear the thorn which your own sin has thrust into your life. (*William Birch.*)

Ver. 28. Remove not the ancient landmarks.—*The old landmarks* :—The wisdom of the Mosaic code is nowhere more manifest than in its provisions touching the tenure of land. Every man in Israel was a landowner, and he must remain so. It was customary to mark the boundaries of estates by corner-stones. To remove these landmarks, if an envious neighbour were so disposed, was an easy matter. But it was prohibited under a severe penalty. We deal with the spiritual inheritance handed down by our fathers as a rich bequest of truth and virtue. An attempt to remove the landmarks of this inheritance is noted as one of the dangerous tendencies of modern thought. 1. One landmark is belief in the supernatural. The hand reached forth to remove this boundary is Agnosticism. 2. Another is Revelation. By which is meant the Holy Scriptures. The enemy of Scripture to-day is Rationalism. To the present controversy as to the trustworthiness of Scripture is due loss of reverence and loss of faith. 3. Another is belief in Christ. The enemies are the various forms of humanitarianism. 4. Another is tradition. There is danger in clamouring against a thing because it bears the seal of antiquity.

Progress in theological circles has come to mean a reckless abandonment of everything that age has sanctified. Dogma is objected to because it has "been handed down." In fact, a dogma is nothing more nor less than a formulated truth bearing the marks of age, and of long trial, and the warrant of venerable authority. (*D. J. Burrell, D.D.*) *Old landmarks*:—I. SOME OF THE LANDMARKS THREATENED. 1. Those of doctrine. The deity of Christ. Salvation by atonement. The necessity for regeneration. 2. Those of Christian life. Laxity in doctrine results in laxity of life. II. REASONS WHY THESE LANDMARKS SHOULD BE LEFT. Loyalty to God as King forbids us from tampering with them, and affection to Him as a Father says, "Respect them." They are the ramparts of the Church. They are the foundations of all true happiness, and the men who have most faithfully stood by them, and most humbly paid homage to them, have been the men who have been the glory of the Church. (*Archibald G. Brown.*) *Eastern land-divisions*:—Eastern fields were not divided by hedge, or wall, or ditch, so there was much danger of confusing the separate properties of individuals. In the East advantage was taken, wherever possible, of natural divisions, such as river-beds, tributary stream-lines, and edges of valleys. But in the open ground the separate properties were only marked by a deeper furrow, or large stones almost buried in the soil. The injunction not to remove a neighbour's landmarks was, therefore, of the utmost importance, as stealthy encroachments might easily be made by shifting these stones. (*Biblical Things not Generally Known.*)

Ver. 29. Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.—*The Bible ideal of man*:—The Bible is a history of human life and a picture of character extending through many ages, and embracing in its scope a vast variety of the family of man. There emerges from this story of life an ideal. There is a moral purpose in all the historical Scriptures. 1. The Bible always recognises a basis of character which is found in the natural endowments of a man. 2. According to the teaching of the Bible there must be a diligent use of these natural powers. 3. The diligence of life must be, according to the Scripture ideal, accompanied by the virtues and purities of a moral self-restraint. 4. This ideal man of the Scripture is to be further inspired by a sense of the Divine presence and power. There is one remark necessary to complete the Bible idea of human life. There is a condition which the Scriptures give us as belonging to life, not necessary to perfection, but almost always present, and helpful to its development. The best of men are greatly crossed and exercised by the sorrows and oppositions which are incident to life. Trouble plays an important part as testing and strengthening and sweetening life. (*L. D. Bevan, D.D.*) *Diligence brings success in life*:—I believe success in life is within the reach of all who set before them an aim and an ambition that is not beyond the talents and ability which God has bestowed upon them. We should all begin life with a determination to do well whatever we take in hand, and if that determination be adhered to with the pluck for which Englishmen are renowned, success, according to the nature and quality of our brain power, is, I think, a certainty. Had I begun life as a tinker, my earnest endeavour would have been to have made better pots and pans than my neighbours; and I think I may venture to say without any vanity that, with God's blessing, I should have been fairly successful. The first step on the ladder that leads to success is the firm determination to succeed; the next is the possession of that moral and physical courage which will enable one to mount up, rung after rung, until the top is reached. The best men make a false step now and then, and some even have very bad falls. The weak and puling cry over their misfortunes, and seek for the sympathy of others, and do nothing further after their first or second failure; but the plucky and the courageous pick themselves up without a groan over their broken bones or their first failures, and set to work to mount the ladder again, full of confidence in themselves, and with faith in the results that always attend upon cheerful perseverance. (*Lord Wolseley.*)

CHAPTER XXIII.

VERS. 1-3. Put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite.—*Moderation*:—This virtue the people of God ought to practise in everything. They should exercise self-government in the desire, the use, the enjoyment, and the

regret of all that pertains to the present world. Here is commended laying restraint on the animal appetites. 1. There are few things, if any, more disgusting and degrading than the studied and anxious indulgence of these appetites. It is particularly loathsome when the man appears to catch with extraordinary avidity the occurrence of a feast, and to be resolved on making the most of his opportunity. 2. There are on such occasions temptations to over-indulgence and excess. And then our self-jealousy and watchfulness should be proportioned to two things—the strength of propensity and the amount of temptation. Eat as if a knife were at thy throat. Eat in the recollection and impression of thine imminent danger. Or the expression may mean, “Otherwise thou wilt put a knife to thy throat if thine appetite have the dominion.” 3. A man’s conduct on such occasions is marked, especially if he be a religious professor. He may in this way bring reproach upon religion, which ever ought, and which, when genuine and duly felt, will impose a restraint on such indulgences. 4. We should also be on our guard against the ostentation of abstinence and plainness—the affectation of extraordinary abstemiousness. 5. There should be special vigilance if there be reason to suspect any snare, any intended temptation for answering a selfish or malicious purpose. Worldly men sometimes do, very wickedly, lay snares for the godly. (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

Ver. 4. Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom.—*Mammon*:—All the precepts of Scripture have their origin in the benevolence of God. Man labours to be rich because he is voluntarily ignorant or forgetful of the requirements of his nature. I. LABOURING TO BE RICH IMPLIES THE CONSECRATION OF OUR POWERS TO THAT ONE OBJECT IN PARTICULAR. But this is not the end for which we are endowed with an intellectual faculty and all the susceptibilities of a moral nature. The accumulation of riches as an end is no more worthy the noble powers of man than building a pyramid of sand. Infinitely beneath the dignity and Divine origin of man is the labouring to be rich. II. WHATEVER TENDS TO WIDEN THE DISTANCE BETWEEN GOD AND MAN MUST BE REGARDED AS AN AGGRAVATION OF OUR FALLEN AND RUINED CONDITION. We are so constituted that we cannot be engrossed with the successful pursuit of two objects at once. You cannot be labouring to be rich, and to be wise unto salvation at the same time. By our own wilful act to alienate the heart from God must be the most inconceivable of all misfortunes, since the highest object of man’s existence is to hold communion with God. For this his nature was originally framed, and in this alone will his nature ever find contentment or repose. III. THE RUINOUS EFFECTS THAT THE PASSION UNDER NOTICE OCCASIONS IN ALL THE MORAL POWERS OF ITS VICTIM. People imagine that riches confer greatness. A man is honoured according to the abundance of his capital. The tendency of this is to inflate the mammon-worshipper with personal vanity. But the greatness which is the exclusive offspring of opulence is a hollow, spurious, and mere visionary greatness. Unsanctified riches tend to render their possessor vain, proud, impatient of restraint, forgetful of the sources of true greatness, and insensible to the wants or respect that is due to others. And the pursuit of riches always ends in disappointment. “Godliness with contentment is great gain.” The true riches, like an overflowing stream, irrigate the heart, and make it bear fruit for eternity, but avarice of gold rushes like a torrent of scorching lava—it may excite the wonder and attract the common attention of mankind, but it leaves behind its devastating march a solitude, and barrenness, and ruin, and death. (W. H. Hill, M.A.)

Ver. 7. For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.—*The importance of a man’s thoughts*:—1. A man is as his thoughts. 2. A man has control over his thoughts. 3. God helps him in the exercise of that control. “We are that really, both to God and to man, which we are inwardly.” (Matthew Henry.) *Thoughts*:—I. THE INFINITE IMPORTANCE OF MEN’S THOUGHTS. This text, in counselling for a particular case, and bidding us test the sincerity of one who invites us, asserts a principle of wide application. You do not know a man until you know his thoughts. God knows him perfectly, because He knows his thoughts. 1. You cannot know a man merely by listening to his words or watching his actions. There is always more, and often better, in men than comes into expression. 2. The revelations of close and trustful friendships are revelations of the thoughts. 3. The claims of God reach beyond right action, and demand right thought. The law of God searches the secret intents of the heart. 4. The redemption that is provided includes in its

scheme the sanctification of the very thought. 5. All sin is represented as springing up out of, and finding expression for, just in the sphere of thought. Show, by appeal to Christian experience, the difficulty found in the restraining of thought. In the unrestrainedness of thought often comes to us the feeling and the mastery of sin. II. THE AMOUNT OF CONTROL MAN HAS OVER HIS THOUGHTS. If he had no control over them his moral responsibility would be gone. We cannot help the evil thoughts coming to us. We have control—1. Over the material of our thoughts. The materials are the sum of past impressions. Thinking is the combining, comparing, and rearranging of the actual contents of the mind. We can direct ourselves away from the evil and towards the good. We can fill our minds with good suggestions and associations. Illustrate from going into scenes suggestive of vice; reading questionable or immoral books, &c. 2. Over the processes of thought. There may be the nourishing of the evil. There may be the swaying of the mind through the power of the renewed will, and with the help of the indwelling Spirit. Apply to wandering thoughts in the house of God. Do we make the mastery of such evil the subject of real effort? III. THE HELP GOD RENDERS MAN IN THE EXERCISE OF SUCH CONTROL. An attempt to regulate thoughts will bring the conviction of human helplessness. When a man has mastered conduct he cannot say that he has mastered himself. When he thinks he has mastered "thoughts" he will surely find that he needs to cry unto God, saying, "Try me and know my thoughts . . . and lead me in the way everlasting." (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *The thoughts of the heart the best evidence of a man's spiritual state:*—The knowledge of ourselves is one of the most noble and excellent attainments in human life. He that knows himself stands fair for immortal felicity. Doctrine: The thoughts of men's hearts do evidence what their spiritual state is. These do ordinarily give the best and surest measure of the frame of men's minds. What thoughts, then, evidence the spiritual state of men? Not occasional thoughts. Not such as arise from strong convictions, that come on us suddenly. Not such as arise from apparent Divine desertions. Despairing thoughts are no sure evidence of the condition of souls. Not such as arise from violent temptations. Not such as arise from men's particular calling and manner of life. Not such as arise from attendance upon, and the performance of, religious duties. The religious discourse of others may produce pious thoughts in an unregenerate person. A man may read God's Word and be yet far from the kingdom. So he may attend the preaching of the Word, and even pray, without having more than surface thoughts. Answering the question affirmatively, mention may be made of voluntary thoughts, such as the mind is apt for and inclines towards. Four qualifications must attend them if they are to be a complete rule and a perfect standard of trial. They must be natural, numerous, satisfactory, and operative. Let us each see to it that our thoughts be such as evidence us to be holy persons. Practise frequent, serious, and close examination. (*Nathanael Walter.*) *The heart-state:*—The body is not the man. Our bodies die. Neither are a man's words himself. Words are often used to conceal, to misrepresent, to counterfeit. Neither is it possible, universally, to discern the essence of character in action. What good man is there who has not again and again failed to do himself justice in his life? Often, on the other hand, actions are much more beautiful than the thoughts of the heart. The essence of human character is found in the heart. It is the disposition, it is the heart-state, which is the true man. This test of human character is a just one, for our life is a progress, is in the direction of the realisation of this heart-state. Action is but heart-expression. The heart-thought, or purpose, is the true man. Not only is human progress towards the realisation of this heart-state, but the separation of the man from this full expression and realisation of his inner desire is not a matter of his own choice or creation, and therefore cannot enter as an element into his character. The field open, covered by the human choice, is only this, present desire. It often happens that a man is to a certain extent kept under the power of religious truth who is in heart utterly disloyal to the Divine law. When the life differs from the heart the latter, not the former, must be regarded as the true man. Sooner or later the full coincidence between the external and internal is inevitable; the full expression of the heart is sure to come. 1. Tendency is everything in the moral world. 2. Explain the different destinies of the Christian and un-Christian life. 3. Abstain from all judgment of your fellow-men. 4. Encourage those who are true and good at heart. (*S. S. Mitchell, D.D.*) *Thought the index of character:*—I. This is the Hebrew way of telling us in a casual word about feasting THAT A MAN'S INMOST THINKING IS THE TRUE INDEX

TO HIS CHARACTER. Talk is superficial. The lip gives a smiling welcome whilst a lofty disdain is in the heart. Mellifluous speech often comes from a malign spirit, whilst "groanings that cannot be uttered" are signs of a yearning supremely Divine. To the perfect ear of God, who catches the faintest quiver of hypocrisy in our devotion, and the lightest tone of insincerity in our song, our "words" justify or condemn us; but to our dull and insensitive organs they are unreliable signs, and our conclusions from them require to be corrected and qualified by the study of other data. We are, therefore, driven back upon the Hebrew teaching that a man is built up from within; that as he does his inward work—all his inward work—so he is in character, being, and power. He must be a whole man in his thinking in order to be to all intents and in all respects a man; for manly thinking, according to our ancient Scriptures, lies at the basis of manhood. II. Christianity accepts and endorses this inward and broad basis of manhood, and employs its fact and revelation, impulse and inspiration, to SECURE A THOROUGH REGENERATION OF MAN'S INMOST LIFE. It seeks to re-create him as a thinker, refuses to look on the mere "scholar" as the full man, and works on the Hebrew idea, lately re-announced by Emerson, that the true notion of manhood is "man thinking; not man the victim of society and a mere thinker, or still worse, the parrot of other men's thinking"—but man, thinking "in his heart," with all his inward forces, conscience and will, fancy and emotion, hope and experience—thinking in the whole of him, and with the whole of him, and for the whole of him and his race, and so making speech the clear, full, and indivisible echo of his thought, and deed the visible garment of his inward life. God means us to be men, and He evokes the forces of an inward life by compelling us to wield the sword with our full strength against the enemy. For as a man battles for truth in his heart, so is he. Cowardly thinking makes a weak and poor life. Christ creates inward courage, heroic daring for reality and right, and renews the manliness of the world. III. THIS IS A THINKING AGE. The sluggish intellect has received an unparalleled awakening, and thinking of nearly all kinds is proceeding with astonishing celerity and productiveness. The manliest thinking is done with the heart, *i.e.*, with the whole of the inner forces of the life. IV. Modern thinking, ignoring the Biblical rule, is SMITTEN WITH THE BLIGHT OF COWARDICE, falls a victim to unreality, and lacks, notwithstanding its pride, Lutheran courage, holy daring, and self-devotion. Young men, do not be misled by the syren of a false peace. Truth is a prize to be won by strenuous battle with the shows and pretences of error, and the shock of downright attack with the foes of faith ought only to whet desire, quicken appetite, and concentrate your forces so that you may become master of the situation. Give to your thinking the courage of the heart, the force of a resolute energy, the patience of an inflexible will, and as sure as you are true to your whole self God will be found of you in Christ Jesus, and become the sunshine of your life and the joy of your heart. V. Another form of this mistake is that we EXPECT TOO MUCH TO BE DONE BY MERE THINKING. Science thinks everything out, and we want to make all life scientific, and so we take out of it our personal trusts, and the subtle ministry of the reflex action of deeds on our thoughts. Convert thought-out truth into loyalty to Jesus Christ, and obedience to His laws. Courageous deed, following intrepid thinking, made the Reformation. VI. NO THINKING IS MANLY WHICH FAILS TO TAKE ADEQUATE ACCOUNT OF THE FORCE OF INTENSE MORAL ENTHUSIASMS. It is provable that only in the white heat of a glowing passion for an ethical goal have we the clearest vision of eternal fact. VII. AGAIN, THE THINKING THAT IS OF THE BRAIN ONLY AND NOT OF THE HEART IS IN SERIOUS DANGER OF PASSING OVER THE "UNSEEN" ORDER AND TREATING IT AS THOUGH IT DID NOT EXIST. It ignores the invisible forces which somehow or other, and from somewhere or other, undeniably find, move, and educate men. VIII. But, above all things, DO NOT LET US BE ALARMED AT ANY OF THE MISTAKES AND MISCHIEFS THAT CAUSE DISOBEDIENCE TO THE CHRISTIAN LAW OF MANLY THINKING. We need have no misgiving about the future. Man is essentially a thinker and a unit, and he must think towards unity, and truth, and perfection. Be his mistakes numberless, he cannot stop. He is made for God. "God is his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"; therefore, after every temporary eclipse, the Sun of Righteousness will break forth and reveal again the way to the Father. (*J. Clifford, D.D.*) *Thought*:—The capacity of thinking is a most wonderful thing. Here lies man's supremacy over all the visible world about him. All great undertakings, the glorious enterprises of men for men's salvation, were once only thoughts. The character of a man's thoughts determines the character of

his life. His actions are inspired from within. Every product of the soul, whether it be an action or a purpose, is first a germ. Sin lies in the soul in germs—in germs as well as in actions. The moral success of life consists in killing evil thoughts in the germ. There are few purer and richer pleasures in this world than the enjoyment of sweet thoughts, happy thoughts, holy thoughts. The heart determines our everlasting destiny. A heart without holiness never shall see the Lord. Christ is the only purifier of the heart. (*Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.*)

Ver. 10, 11. **Their Redeemer is mighty.**—*Social injustice* :—I. SOCIAL INJUSTICE INDICATED. "Remove not the old landmarks." What are the landmarks? The rights of man as man. 1. Every man has a right to personal freedom. 2. To the produce of his own labour. 3. To freedom in religion. II. SOCIAL INJUSTICE PERPETRATED ON THE HELPLESS. "Enter not into the fields of the fatherless." Orphans have their rights. There are villains in society who perpetrate outrages on orphans. 1. This is cowardly. 2. This is cruel. 3. This is common. III. SOCIAL INJUSTICE JUDICIALLY REGARDED BY GOD. "Their Redeemer is mighty." Redeemer here means "next of kin." The mighty God is the protector of the helpless. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The fatherless* :—These are taken under God's special protection; with Him they not only find mercy shown to them, but justice done for them. He is their Redeemer, their God, their near kinsman, that will take their part, and stand up for them with jealousy, as taking Himself affront in the injuries done to them. He is mighty—almighty; His omnipotence is engaged and employed for their protection, and their proudest and most powerful oppressors will not only find themselves an unequal match for this, but will find that it is at their peril to contend with it. Every man must be careful not to injure the fatherless in anything, or to invade their rights. Being fatherless, they have none to redress their wrongs, and, being in their childhood, they do not so much as apprehend the wrong that is done them. Sense of honour, and much more the fear of God, would restrain men from offering any injury to children, especially fatherless children. (*Matthew Henry*.)

Ver. 12. **Apply thine heart unto instruction, and thine ears to the words of knowledge.**—*Spiritual knowledge* :—I. Because of its own worth. A knowledge of the creation, its elements, laws, objects, extent, is valuable, but a knowledge of the Creator is infinitely more valuable. "This is life eternal, to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." II. Because man is PRONE TO OVERLOOK THE IMPORTANCE of this knowledge. It is sad, that that which man requires most he cares least for, that the most priceless treasure is least valued. III. Because to ATTAIN IT THERE MUST BE PERSONAL APPLICATION. "Apply thine heart unto instruction." It is a knowledge that cannot be imparted irrespective of the use of man's own faculties. He must apply persistently, earnestly, devoutly. (*Homilist.*) *The heart and the ears* :—Observe the connection between the application of the heart and the ears. The heart open to sound advice or moral precept is yet shut to Christ and His doctrine. It is closed up in unbelief, prejudice, indifference, and the love of pleasure. A listless heart, therefore, produces a careless ear. But when the heart is graciously opened, softened, and enlightened, the attention of the ear is instantly fixed. This, indeed, is the Lord's creative work; yet wrought by a God of order in the use of His own means. Awakened desire brings to prayer. Prayer brings the blessing. And precious then is every word of knowledge. (*C. Bridges, M.A.*)

Ver. 15. **My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.**—*The happy parent* :—I. THE ATTAINMENT REQUIRED. A pious youth is said to be wise in heart. 1. To show us that religion is wisdom. 2. That this wisdom is not notional, but consists principally in dispositions and actions. Religion has to do "with the heart"; and a knowledge that does not reach the heart, and govern the heart, is nothing. II. THE CONSEQUENCE ANTICIPATED. Pious children afford their parents pleasure on three principles. 1. A principle of benevolence. 2. Of piety. God is particularly pleased and glorified by the sacrifices of early religion. 3. Of self-interest. Distinguish between self-interest and selfishness. The piety of children affords parents evidence of the answer of their prayers and the success of their endeavours, and so delights them. It becomes a means of their usefulness. By such children parents hope to serve their generation. It ensures to parents a proper return of duty. And it will free them from a thousand bitter anxieties, such as are caused by children's removal from home; taking any important step in

life; or being bereaved of their dearest relations. Conclusion: 1. Address those who, instead of a joy to their parents, are only a grief. 2. Address parents. Have you conscientiously discharged your duty towards your children? If you have, and nevertheless find your "house not so with God" as you desire, yield not to despair. Never cease to pray and to admonish. Some shower of rain may cause the seed, which has long been buried under the dryness of the soil, to strike root and spring up. (*W. Jay.*) *Religion, true wisdom*:—I. WHY RELIGION MAY BE DESCRIBED AS TRUE WISDOM. 1. As it involves the possession and right application of knowledge. 2. As it gives the first attention to the most momentous concerns. 3. As it adopts the most likely means for securing these great ends. 4. As it secures the greatest amount of good both for the present and the future. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS TO YOUNG PEOPLE. 1. Because of their necessary inexperience. 2. Because of the countless perils which surround them. 3. Because the future circumstances of life depend much upon the course adopted in youth. III. THE CERTAIN MEANS OF ITS ATTAINMENT. 1. There must be a deep conviction of its need and value. 2. There must be the hearty and simple application of faith, for its realisation. 3. Let this resolution, and application of devout earnestness and faith, be adopted now. In conclusion, present the subject to your serious attention—(1) By the evils of neglecting religion; and—(2) The moral loveliness and excellency connected with devout and serious piety. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Parental wishes*:—Persons may form a judgment of their own dispositions from their wishes about their children. Worldly men make it their great work to provide those things for their children which they account their own best things. Saints desire above all things that the hearts of their children may be richly furnished with wisdom, and that their lips may speak right things; for the heart is the throne of Wisdom, and by the lips she discovers her possession of that throne. (*George Lawson, D.D.*)

Ver. 17. Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.—*Envy of sinners forbidden, and the fear of God enjoined*:—

I. SOME OF THE REASONS WHY MEN VERY FREQUENTLY ARE INDUCED TO ENVY SINNERS. 1. They perhaps see them possessed of wealth, in the enjoyment of many outward comforts, and encircled with the means of gratification; and these are things after which human nature hankers. The idea of happiness is commonly connected with the possession of them. But, surely, to envy these fleeting possessions little becomes a wise man. Surely his lot is not to be desired who lives here under the Divine displeasure, and who must very shortly endure the righteous judgment of a justly offended God. 2. But we find men sometimes disposed to envy sinners on account of the apparent freedom from care and anxiety in which they live. But that gay unconcern about eternal things which is attributed to them we ought to commiserate rather than envy. 3. But whatever circumstances in the condition of the sinner men may admire, unbelief is the source from which all envy of his lot must proceed. II. THE NATURE AND EFFECTS OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD. 1. It is not a fear of Him as an irresistible and implacable enemy; but it is a fear grounded on a just perception of the excellency of the Divine character, connected with love to Him, and with an expectation of the largest blessings from His hand. 2. But what are the effects which the fear of God will produce? (1) In the first place, it will lead to repentance for sin, accompanied by an earnest desire of reconciliation to God, and of the restoration of His favour. (2) But again, the fear of God is the only principle which can lead a man to an universal and unreserved obedience to His commands. (*B. Scott, M.A.*) *The cure for envy*:—The cure for envy lies in living under a constant sense of the Divine presence, worshipping God and communing with Him all the day long, however long the day may seem. True religion lifts the soul into a higher region, where the judgment becomes more clear, and the desires are more elevated. The more of heaven there is in our lives, the less of earth we shall covet. The fear of God casts out the envy of men. The death-blow of envy is a calm consideration of the future. The wealth and glory of the ungodly are a vain show. This pompous appearance flashes out for an hour, and then is extinguished. What is the prosperous sinner the better for his prosperity when judgment overtakes him? As for the godly man, his end is peace and blessedness, and none can rob him of his joy; wherefore, let him forego envy, and be filled with sweet content. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The nature and advantages of the fear of the Lord*:—

Scarcely anything has a more immediate influence upon our duty or comfort than the due government of our passions. Hence the wise and virtuous, in all ages,

have employed themselves in forming rules for their regulation. But it is found more easy to prescribe, than to reduce these rules to practice. The religion of Jesus provides the assistance requisite to enable us to comply with rules. I. WHAT IS IT TO BE IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD ALL THE DAY LONG? Fear is a passion of the human mind, and stands opposed to hope. It always has for its object some evil, real or supposed. Here its object is the evil and danger of sinning against God, and the just displeasure of God, in consequence of offending Him. To fear these is to fear the Lord in the best sense of the phrase. We should live under the habitual influence of this holy temper, and carry it with us into all the duties of the religious and social life. II. WHY SHOULD WE STUDY TO BE IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD ALL THE DAY LONG? 1. It is an excellent guard against the commission of sin. The man cannot knowingly and deliberately sin against God who has a suitable sense of His being, perfections, character and government. 2. It really assists us in the right performance of duty. It greatly tends to invigorate the graces of the Spirit in the soul, and to call them forth into lively exercise. 3. It excites us to the important duty of watchfulness, and greatly assists us therein. 4. God recommends this duty to our study and practice, by His Divine authority. Then if you would be in the fear of the Lord—(1) Study to acquire more and more of the knowledge of God: the knowledge of His perfections, character, and government; especially as they are manifested in and through His Son Jesus Christ. (2) Be much frequent in meditating upon the Divine perfections. (3) Be much in the great duties of prayer and watchfulness. (*John Rodgers, D.D.*) *Of the duty of fearing God:—The fear of the Lord is sometimes the whole duty of man; sometimes the devotional duties of religion.* I. THE TRUE NOTION OF FEARING GOD. 1. It must be such a fear as includes in it a high degree of love. Then we shall make a difficulty of nothing He commands. Then our service of Him will be rendered more acceptable. 2. It includes it in a generous hope and confidence. Hope is the spring of industry. II. THE INFLUENCE THIS FEAR HAS TO SUPPRESS IN US ALL ENVIOUS AND DISQUIETING THOUGHTS. By a holy fear we secure to ourselves an interest in His special providence and protection and grace here, and in the promises of glory and eternal life hereafter. III. PROPER MOTIVES AND ARGUMENTS TO ENFORCE THIS DUTY OF FEARING GOD. 1. From the consideration of His infinite power and majesty. 2. From His intimate knowledge of all our thoughts, words, and actions, and of the secret springs of them. 3. The consideration of God's justice. He hath appointed a day wherein He will judge the world in righteousness. This is an irresistible argument to excite us to the practice of piety. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*) *The principle by which each person is to be perpetually governed:—Many mistake by viewing religion as separate from common life, and as hardly to be made to accord with it.* I. THE PRINCIPLE WHICH IS TO ACTUATE US. "The fear of the Lord." The fear attends the whole of religion. 1. As a quality, to temper the whole; to bind doctrine and knowledge; to keep confidence from growing up into rank presumption, and liberty from degenerating into licentiousness. 2. As a quickener, to excite and to enliven the whole. II. THE EXTENSIVENESS OF ITS INFLUENCE. To be in the fear shows the frequency of its exercise, and of its invariable constancy. See the attributes of this fear as regards—1. Devotions, regular and ejaculatory. 2. The business of the day. 3. The trials of the day. 4. Its relaxation, recreation, and refreshment. 5. The company of the day. 6. The opportunities and occasions of the day. III. THE ADVANTAGE OF ITS HABITUALNESS. 1. It will render religion more easy and pleasant. 2. It will render your religion more obvious and certain. It furnishes the best evidences of its reality. Then be concerned to exercise diligence. (1) All the day long you are in danger. (2) God is all day long doing you good. (3) All the day long you are observed, even by your fellow-creatures, much more than you are aware of. (4) You are accountable all the day long. (*W. Jay.*) *The wicked not to be envied:—I. WHAT IS IT IN SINNERS THAT WE ARE APT TO ENVY?* 1. Many sinners have much money. Riches are not necessary to any man. Still, human nature is so weak and so corrupt that but few men can look at the wealthy without envying them. 2. Sometimes the wicked seem to have a great deal of pleasure. Take their word for it, and no people are so happy. Those who have not health, or money, or time thus to live at ease, are very apt to envy these lovers of pleasure. 3. Some sinners seem to get many of the honours of life. They seek the honour that cometh from man, and they have their reward. Silly people stand off and admire and envy. 4. Some envy the wicked for their apparent freedom from restraint. The law of God does not bind them any further than suits themselves. To a carnal mind this looks like a

fine way of getting through the world, and the foolish envy these lawless ones. 5. Sometimes sinners seem to be, and for a long time are, free from afflictions, which so much distress the righteous. II. THERE IS NO GOOD GROUND FOR PREFERRED THE STATE OF SINNERS. There is really no Divine blessing permanently resting on the wicked, as there is on the righteous. There is also a sad amount of alloy mixed up with all that sinners have. The passions of sinners are at war with each other and with mankind. The devices of the wicked will ruin them. The wicked are not without smittings of conscience. All nature is armed against the wicked. Instead of envying sinners, pity them and pray for them. Let the righteous show that they are pleased with the choice which they have made. (*W. S. Plumer, D.D.*) *Divine providence* :—The text is a persuasive to contentment and satisfaction with Divine providence, which permits wicked men to flourish for awhile, enforced with this reason, that there is a reward laid up for all such as trust in God and meekly submit to His will. 1. Let the times be never so perilous and dangerous, yet God's providence ought not to be questioned by us, whatever its unequal distributions be. Answering the objection that, if God's providence governs all the issues and events of things, virtue should never go unrewarded, plead that there is no man but has grievously sinned against the Lord. Therefore they can have no cause to question His justice in their suffering. Besides this, it may be urged that affliction is a proof of God's tender love and kindness; that the prosperity of the wicked often turns to their hurt and disadvantage; and that the day of judgment will set all things right. 2. Show how we are to demean ourselves under the actual oppressions of prosperous wickedness. The best course for a man to take is to hold himself to God, to trust in Him, and order himself according to His will. 3. We must not go out of the road of duty, and do as the wicked do, because we see them prosper. 4. The flourishing condition of the wicked is but short-lived, and therefore not to be envied. 5. There is an assured reward, if ye have patience awhile, and meekly submit to the will of God in His providential administrations. Then seek to live so that God may bless you with the continuance of His blessings. (*T. Knaggs, M.A.*) *All the day long* :—I. THE PRESCRIBED COURSE OF THE BELIEVER. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." We must be in the fear of the Lord before we can remain in it. The fear is for all the day, and for every day. Some have a religion of show, others a religion of spasms. Ours must never be a religion that is periodic in its flow, like certain intermittent springs. Beware of the godliness which varies with the calendar. Note the details which are comprised in this exhortation. Remember not merely to associate religion with the routine of life, but also with special occasions. There are excellent reasons for being in the fear of the Lord all the day long. He sees us all the day long. Sin is equally evil all the day long. You always belong to Christ. You can never tell when or how Satan will attack you. Your Lord may come at any hour.

II. THE PROBABLE INTERRUPTION. It has happened to godly men in all ages to see the wicked prosper, and they have been staggered by the sight. There is no real cause for envying the wicked; and envying them will do you serious harm. Envy helps in no way, and hinders in many ways. III. THE HELPFUL CONSIDERATION. 1. There is an end of this life. 2. There is an end of the worldling's prosperity. 3. God has an end in your present trouble and exercise. 4. There will be no failure to your expectation. The promise of God is in itself a possession, and our expectation of it is in itself an enjoyment. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *A caution against envy and a call to piety* :—I. A SERIOUS CAUTION. This should be regarded—1. Because envy is a disposition of mind whose influence can never be justified. 2. Because to envy sinners is absurd. II. THE ADMONITORY PRECEPT. This implies—1. To be in possession of correct and spiritual ideas of His holy and exalted character. 2. To cultivate suitable dispositions of heart towards Him. III. AN ENCOURAGING ASSERTION. "For surely there is an end," &c. 1. There is an end to that prosperity with which the efforts of sinners are crowned. 2. There is an end to the tribulation of the saints. 3. The expectation of those who continue in the fear of the Lord shall not be cut off. Human expectations are cut off by slothful and indolent habits, and by unforeseen occurrences. Instead of envying sinners, saints should pity them, pray for them, set them good examples, and try to save them. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*)

Ver. 18. Surely there is an end.—*The end* :—Let religion be the very atmosphere in which you live and move and have your being; and the reason for this is, "surely there is an end." I. THE SOLEMN CERTAINTY WHICH NOBODY CAN DENY. 1. All our

actions, thoughts, feelings, capabilities, everything about us, relations and all the rest of it, will come to a close, and leave behind them consequences that never come to a close. Behind everything something else lies, and that afterwards is made by the present, and is an outcome of it. The fleeting events and fugitive thoughts and feelings and actions of our daily life, that pass away and are forgotten, all leave behind them consequences which grow and grow for ever and ever. 2. Everything we do here will mould our character and help to make ourselves, and will spring up after many days. That is true of life and of the great hereafter beyond life. II. THE BRIGHT POSSIBILITIES WHICH GO ALONG WITH THIS TEXT. The hereafter to which the end of life is the narrow portal shall more than fulfil all thy expectations. Take Christ for your Saviour, and Master, and then swift-footed time may work His will; when this wide earth and all its fleeting scenes will change, you will be brought to the fulfilment of all your hopes, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*) *Duties and reasons*:—The words of the text contain—I. DUTIES. 1. The avoidance of envy. Envy is that affection which causes grief at the happiness and prosperity of others. It is associated with maliciousness. It is derived from a Latin word signifying "not to see." The name is therefore characteristic. Why should not sinners be envied? Because it is foolish to do so. It is a false supposition that they are happy because they possess temporal advantages. Because it is unjust. Because it is un-Christian. We are taught by God to pity and pray for sinners. 2. A reverence for God. This fear is not slavish, that urges us to flee from danger, but filial, Divinely wrought in the soul. II. REASONS. All obligations are founded on reasons. 1. There is an end to the sinner's prosperity. There is an end to every Christian's trials. 2. God here promises to realise the expectations of those who fear Him. What do they expect? Their temporal wants supplied. Deliverance from dangers. Help in trouble. Grace to restrain from sin, to sanctify their souls, and to prepare them for heaven. These expectations shall not be cut off. (*T. Harland.*) *The afterwards and our hope*:—The Book of Proverbs seldom looks beyond the limits of the temporal, but now and then the mists lift and the wider horizon is disclosed. Our text is one of these exceptional instances, and is remarkable, not only as expressing confidence in the future, but as expressing it in a very striking way. "Surely there is an end," says our Authorised Version, substituting in the margin, for end, "reward." The latter word is placed in the text of the Revised Version. But neither "end" nor "reward" conveys the precise idea. The word so translated literally means "something that comes after." So it is the very opposite of "end"; it is really that which lies beyond the end—the "sequel," or the "future"—as the margin of the Revised Version gives alternately, or, more simply still, the "Afterwards." Surely there is an afterwards behind the end. And then the proverb goes on to specify one aspect of that afterwards: "Thine expectation"—or, better, because more simply, "thy hope"—shall not be cut off. And then, upon these two convictions it builds the plain, practical exhortation: "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." I. THE CERTAINTY OF THE HEREAFTER. My text, of course, might be watered down and narrowed so as to point only to sequels to deeds realised in this life. And then it would be teaching us simply the very much-needed lessons that even in this life "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." But it seems to me that we are entitled to see here, as in one or two other places in the Book of Proverbs, a dim anticipation of a future life beyond the grave. Now, the question comes to be, Where did the coiners of proverbs, whose main interest was in the obvious maxims of a prudential morality, get this conviction? They did not get it from any lofty experience of communion with God, like that which in the seventy-third Psalm marks the very high-water mark of Old Testament faith in regard to a future life. They did not get it from any clear definite revelation, such as we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but they got it from thinking over the facts of this present life as they appeared to them, looked at from a standpoint of a belief in God, and in righteousness. And so they represent to us the impression that is made upon a man's mind, if he has the "eye that has kept watch o'er man's mortality," that is made by the facts of this earthly life, viz., that it is so full of onward-looking, prophetic aspect, so manifestly and tragically, and yet wonderfully and hopefully, incomplete and fragmentary in itself, that there must be something beyond in order to explain, in order to vindicate the life that now is. You sometimes see a row of houses, the end one of which has, in its outer gable wall, bricks protruding here and there, and holes for chimney-pieces that are yet to be put in. And just as surely as that external wall says that the row is half-

built, and there are some more tenements to be added to it, so surely does the life that we now live here, in all its aspects almost, bear upon itself the stamp that it, too, is but initial and preparatory. You sometimes see, in the bookseller's catalogue, a book put down "volume one; all that is published." That is our present life—volume one, all that is published. Surely there is going to be a sequel, volume two. What is the meaning of the fact that of all the creatures on the face of the earth only you and I, and our brethren and sisters, do not find in our environment enough for our powers? What is the meaning of the fact that lodged in men's natures there lies that strange power of painting to themselves things that are not as though they were? So that minds and hearts go out wandering through eternity, and having longings and possibilities which nothing beneath the stars can satisfy, or can develop? The meaning of it is this: "surely there is a hereafter." God does not so cruelly put into men longings that have no satisfaction, and desires which never can be filled, as that there should not be, beyond the gulf, the fair land of the hereafter. Every human life obviously has in it, up to the very end, the capacity for progress. There may be masters in workshops who take apprentices, and teach them their trade during the years that are needed, and then turn round and say, "I have no work for you, so you must go and look for it somewhere else." That is not how God does. When He has trained His apprentices He gives them work to do. "Surely there is a hereafter." But that is only part of what is involved in this thought. It is not only a state subsequent to the present, but it is a state consequent on the present, and the outcome of it. To-day is the child of all the yesterdays, and the yesterdays and to-day are the parent of to-morrow. The past, our past, has made us what we are in the present, and what we are in the present is making us what we shall be in the future. And when we pass out of this life we pass out, notwithstanding all changes, the same men as we were. And so we carry ourselves with us into that future life, and "what a man soweth that shall he also reap." "Oh! that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their 'afterwards.'" II. Now, secondly, my text suggests THE IMMORTALITY OF HOPE. "Thine expectation"—or rather, as I said, "thy hope"—"shall not be cut off." This is a characteristic of that hereafter. What a wonderful saying that is which also occurs in this Book of Proverbs, "The righteous hath hope in his death"! Ah! We all know how swiftly, as years increase, the things to hope for diminish, and how, as we approach the end, less and less do our imaginations go out into the possibilities of the sorrowing future. And when the end comes, if there is no afterword, the dying man's hopes must necessarily die before he does. If when we pass into the darkness we are going into a cave with no outlet at the other end, then there is no hope, and you may write over it Dante's grim word: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here." "The righteous hath hope in his death." "Thine expectation shall not be cut off." But, further, that conviction of the afterword opens up for us a condition in which imagination is surpassed by the wondrous reality. Here, I suppose, nobody ever had all the satisfaction out of a fulfilled hope that he expected. The fish is always a great deal larger and heavier when we see it in the water than when it is lifted out and scaled. But there does come a time, if you believe that there is an afterwards, when all we desired and painted to ourselves of possible good for our craving spirits shall be felt to be but a pale reflex of the reality, like the light of some unrisen sun on the snowfields, and we shall have to say "the half was not told to us." III. And now, finally, notice THE BEARING OF ALL THIS ON THE DAILY PRESENT. "Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long." Why, if there were no future, it would be just as wise, just as blessed, just as incumbent upon us to "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long." But, seeing that there is that future, and seeing that only in it will hope rise to fruition, and yet subsist as longing, surely there comes to us a solemn appeal to "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long," which, being turned into Christian language, is to live by habitual faith, in communion with, and love and obedience to, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Surely, surely the very climax of folly is shutting the eyes to that future that we all have to face, and to live here ignoring it and God, and cribbing, cabining, and confining all our thoughts within the narrow limits of the things present and visible. "Surely there is an afterwards," and if thou wilt "be in the fear of the Lord all the day long," then for evermore "thy hope shall not be cut off." (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 19. Hear thou, my son, and be wise, and guide thine heart in the way.—*Three important precepts:*—The words are very direct and personal. I. THE

PRECEPT CONTAINED IN THE WORD "HEAR." I take it to mean, "Hear the gospel." "Take heed what ye hear." 1. Take care that you hear with a view to obtaining faith in the Lord Jesus. 2. Hear without prejudice. 3. Hear for yourself. 4. Hear when the sermon is done. 5. Hear the gospel as the voice of God. He that hath an ear towards God will find that God hath an ear towards him. II. THE PRECEPT CONTAINED IN THE WORDS "BE WISE." 1. Try to understand what you hear. Try to know saving truth. 2. Believe the gospel as it comes from God. This is an age of doubt. But it does not take any great quantity of brain to be a doubter. 3. Be affected by what you have heard. 4. Take care that you do not wander into evil company. 5. Take care to do what you hear. III. THE PRECEPT CONTAINED IN THE WORDS "GUIDE THINE HEART IN THE WAY." There is but one "way." The "way" is often described in Scripture. It is the way of faith; of truth; of holiness; of peace. It is a narrow way. Then put your heart into your religion. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The self-discipline suitable to certain mental moods*:—In our course through life our minds are liable to be placed in certain states of feeling, strongly marked, and for the time strongly prevailing. And this by causes, by influences and circumstances, independent of our will. We might call them moods—by some they are denominated frames. These states of feeling should be carefully turned to a profitable account; we should avail ourselves of what there is in them specially adapted to afford improvement. The states of feeling to which we refer are such as are not essentially evil. They may be called a kind of natural seasons in the soul. These varied feelings are of the two great classes, the pleasing and the unpleasing; the latter being felt oftener and more sensibly. Take the image of a person in a high state of exhilaration; his soul over-running with delight, his countenance lighted up with animation. What will be the benefit of this if he do not exercise reflection, if he do not "guide his heart"? It may lead to direct evil. At the best, he will just indulge himself in the fulness of his satisfaction. He will have no use of his delight but to enjoy it. One point of wisdom in such a case may be, somewhat to repress and sober such an exhilaration of the heart. Some of this exhilaration should be directed into the channel of gratitude to God. It should lead a man to watch narrowly to see what kind of nature he has to be acted upon; a sad nature, truly, if he finds that the more its wishes are gratified the worse it becomes, if left to itself. The spring and energy of spirit felt in these pleasurable seasons of the heart should be applied to the use of a more spirited performance of the Christian duties in general, but especially to those that are the most congenial. How much time is passed by mankind collectively in a state of feeling decidedly infelicitous, as compared with their experience of animated pleasure! And how small a portion of this painful feeling is turned to any good account! There are occasional states of darkened, gloomy feeling, in which sensibility becomes pensiveness, and gravity sadness. The immediate cause may have been some untoward turn of events; some painful disappointment, or death of friends, or constitutional tendency, or defective health. But this infelicitous season of the soul may be turned to lasting advantage. When the disorder is mainly due to bodily conditions, expedients of alleviation may properly be sought. But at such times opportunity is given for serious consideration. Are there no great and solemn questions which you have hitherto left undecided? This is reasonable pleading. It is but requiring that a man should not be willing to come out from a temporary and special state of feeling without having availed himself of that advantage which it has specially offered him. Apply to another state of feeling—an indignant excitement of mind against human conduct. (John Foster.)

Ver. 23. **Buy the truth, and sell it not.**—*A domestic homily on buying the truth*: When the wise man counselled his pupil to "buy the truth," he had the whole range of truth before his mind: truth in history, in science, in social economics, in morals, and in religion. It is a slander that revelation, or the religion which accepts revelation as its guide, seeks the shade of ignorance and demands to lead its devotees blindfolded through the universe. Revelation demands light, and ever more light. The words of the text are a warrant for all investigation that has truth for its object. But it more especially refers to moral and religious truth. I. THE TRUTH IS AN EMINENTLY DESIRABLE POSSESSION. Truth is capable of becoming much more intimately and inseparably the possession of a man than any of those things which men usually call their possessions. The truth bought secures to men the great end of all possessions—blessedness. The truth restores conscience to an

active and undisputed sovereignty, harmonises the will and the reason, and casts out the foreign elements which have disturbed the movements of the inner life. II. IT IS OUR DUTY TO SECURE THE TRUTH AS OUR POSSESSION. "Buy." Do not stand chaffering about it; promptly make it your own. 1. We must go in quest of it. A man must be assiduous, painstaking, persevering in his search. And he must be cautious. 2. We must approach Truth, and live with her, trustfully. The intellect may assent, while the soul remains sceptical, and stands aloof. 3. The truth must be obeyed. She enters the soul as a queen. She demands to dictate every action, to shape every plan, to control every feeling. There is, perhaps, no utterly conclusive evidence of what is strictly moral or religious truth, but that of the inward witness, which speaks in the soul of the man who is living in the truth; that is, cordially and spontaneously obeying it. 4. We must be ready to make sacrifice for the truth. Prejudices must be sacrificed. Tastes, appetites, and passions, which the truth cannot sanction, must be sacrificed. If we are to get and hold the truth we must search, trust, obey, and make sacrifice. (*Alex. Hannay, D.D.*) *Buying the truth*:—To be said of all truths, but especially of the highest. I. HOW IS TRUTH BOUGHT? In one sense it is free as air, but in seeking and keeping it we make surrenders. Labour and search may need to be paid. Prejudice, pride of heart, illusions broken. Sins of heart and life forsaken. Esteem of friends and of the world may need to be parted with. II. HOW TRUTH MAY BE SOLD. Not when it is communicated; thereby we buy more. But when it is not communicated, when it is betrayed from fear or allurements, when it is held in unrighteousness, selfishness, treachery, inconsistency, we sell the truth. III. WHY, WHEN BOUGHT, IT SHOULD NEVER BE SOLD. It has a value beyond all you can get for it. Its value grows the longer you keep it. It buys all other good things at last. When sold, it is hard to be bought back. (*John Ker, D.D.*) *Buy the truth, sell it not*:—I. INQUIRE WHAT TRUTH IS. Of truths there are many kinds. 1. Those proper to the studies of great scholars. 2. Those concerning the preservation of our bodies. 3. Those concerning the making and executing of laws. 4. Those relating to husbandry, tillage, and business. The truth here is "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus." II. THE NATURE AND QUALITY OF THIS MERCHANDISE. It containeth all those precepts and conclusions that concern the knowledge and service of God, and that conduce to virtue and integrity and uprightness of life. This truth is fit and proportionable to the soul of man, which is made capable of it. As it is fitted to all, so it is lovely and amiable in the eyes of all, even of those who will not buy it. III. THE TRUTH MUST BE BOUGHT. It will not be ours unless we lay out something and purchase it. We do not stumble on this truth by chance. If men's faith cost them more, they would make more use of it than they do. IV. WHAT IS IT TO BUY THE TRUTH? The price is yourselves. Ye must lay down yourselves at the altar of truth, and be offered up as a sacrifice for it. You must offer up your understandings, your wills, and your affections. Give up your prejudices. Cast away all malice to the truth, all distasting of it, all averseness to it. What helps does the God of truth afford us for the obtaining of the truth? 1. Meditation, or fixing of our thoughts upon the truth. 2. Prayer, which draweth down grace. 3. Exercise and practice of those truths we learn. (*A. Farindon, B.D.*) *Buying the truth*:—Truth is but one, and it is in God, and of God; nay, it is God Himself. This truth is from Him conveyed into divers things, which are therefore termed true. The Word is the truth, because God is the author of it; because inspired men wrote it; because Christ confirmed it; and because the Spirit of Truth interprets it. Buying includes a desire of the commodity; a repairing to the place where it is set to sale; a skill to discern and know the goodness of it; giving a price proportionable to the value of it; and a storing of it up for necessary uses. (*S. Hieron.*) *The birthright of truth*:—1. TRUTH IS A MATTER OF PURCHASE. Truth is, in itself, one, perfect, and eternal. To us it is a growing and increasing treasure. The truth we consider is that which has been delivered down to us through the Scriptures. We get truth by having the eye ever open to observe it; by reading, meditation, and conversation. II. TRUTH MUST NOT BE SOLD. Amongst other shrines at which we shall be tempted to sell the truth is—1. The commercial spirit of the day. We are tempted by the mode in which the arrangements of the kingdom of Christ are compelled to make way for the arrangements of this world. This absorption of mind by the spirit of earthly gain gives little time for religious exercises, and breeds an inclination to extol certain business virtues. 2. Men sacrifice the truth on the altar of a narrow-minded exclusiveness in the application of the privileges and blessings of

truth. Truth is lost in sectarianism. 3. There is peril for truth in the spirit of rationalism that is abroad. (*E. Monro.*) *The price of truth*:—I. WHAT IT COSTS TO KNOW TRUTH. By truth we mean, an agreement between an object and our idea of it. We want to know, What is moral truth? What is universal truth? To attain it, take seven precepts. Be attentive. Do not be discouraged at labour. Suspend your judgment. Let prejudice yield to reason. Be teachable. Restrain your avidity of knowing. In order to edify your mind, subdue your heart. II. THE WORTH AND ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH. 1. It will open to you an infinite source of pleasure. 2. It will fit you for the various employments to which you may be called in society. 3. It will free you from many disagreeable doubts about religion. 4. It will render you intrepid at the approach of death. (*Ibid.*) *The sale of truth*:—"Sell not the truth" means—I. Do not lose the disposition of mind, the aptness to universal truth, when ye have acquired it. 2. It reproves those mercenary souls who trade with their wisdom and sell it, as it were, by the penny. 3. By selling may be understood, betraying truth. To betray truth is, through any sordid motive, to suppress, or to disguise, things of consequence to the glory of religion, the interest of a neighbour, or the good of society. There are six orders of persons who may sell truth—1. The courtier. 2. The indiscreet zealot. 3. The apostate. 4. The judge. 5. The politician. 6. The pastor. (*Ibid.*) *Buy the truth*:—The meaning of the exhortation seems to be, that we should endeavour to acquire that happy disposition of soul which will make us give to every question the time and attention it deserves; to every proof its due force; to every difficulty its full weight; and to every advantage its true value. But this disposition cannot be had for nought; it must be acquired by attention and toil: it must be bought by the sacrifice of dissipation and of indolence. We can easily observe in what narrow bounds the mind of man is confined; how defective its powers are, and how limited their operations. If, therefore, when it is necessary to consider some combined proposition, we do not bestow upon it proportionable attention, we shall infallibly overlook some of its properties, and, consequently, our conclusion will be partial and absurd. This reasoning is confirmed by invariable experience: for every man may remember some things which have appeared false or true, certain or doubtful, according to the hurry or the attention with which he examined them. To acquire this habitual attention is commonly a toilsome work, and therefore demands the sacrifice of our indolence. The labour of the mind is evidently more wearisome than that of the body: for we may see the greatest part of mankind submitting without repugnance to the heaviest bodily toil, rather than suffer that which is mental. This labour, however, is surmountable; and, like all others, by custom, may be rendered easy. Exercise is therefore necessary to acquire the faculty of continued attention, which, when once acquired, will enable us to compare the most sublime ideas, and to investigate the most abstruse parts of knowledge. Then shall we reckon as nothing the sacrifices we have made; and the truth, when we have obtained it, will never be deemed too dear. It will open to us a fruitful source of pleasures; it will form us to fill with propriety our different employments; it will rid us of all troublesome scruples; and render us intrepid at the approach of death. The placid and serene pleasures of the intellect are beyond comparison sweeter than those which are excited merely by the gross organs of sense, or by the more turbulent passions of the soul. And if the pleasure of advancing in human knowledge be very great, as it is universally allowed to be, what charms must accompany the attainment of that knowledge which concerns the things of immortality! It is in retirement that our attention can exert its full force, and consider religion in all its views. Truth will enable us, besides, to fill with propriety the different employments to which we are called in society. A man who has cultivated his mind will distinguish himself in every station; and a man whose way of thinking is erroneous or futile, will in every station be pitted or despised. Truth will, moreover, free us from every importunate and troublesome scruple. "To be tossed about with every wind of doctrine" is a most violent situation; and yet it is a situation which none can avoid, except those who are seriously engaged in the study of truth, or those who are utterly insensible. Finally, the value of truth appears in the serenity which it procures at the approach of death. The famous story of Cato Uticensis is well known. Having resolved to quit this world, he wished much to be assured that there was another. For this purpose he read over attentively Plato's book concerning the immortality of the soul; and the reasonings of that philosopher satisfied him so fully, that he died with the greatest tranquillity. He saw beyond the grave another Rome, where tyranny could have no dominion.

where Pompey could be no more oppressed, and Cæsar could triumph no more. So long as the soul fluctuates between light and darkness, between persuasion and doubt; so long as it has only presumptions and probabilities in favour of religion; it is nearly impossible to behold death without dread; but the Christian who is enlightened, confirmed, and strengthened, being raised above its power, is secure from all its terrors. If Cato the heathen could brave this terrible king, what would not Cato the Christian have done? (*A. Macdonald.*) *Buy the truth:—*

I. THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF TRUTH. Were it a matter of equal and unavailing indifference whether we embraced truth or error, what advantages could be derived from the culture of education, from the progress of learning, or the discoveries of knowledge? Were this maxim once admissible, the untutored heathen, and the enlightened Christian would be completely on a level. Were truth of no importance to the security, the welfare, and the happiness of mankind, what occasion is there for the deep researches of philosophers, for the ardent zeal of theologians, and for the wearisome labours of the real student? But in the awful concerns of religion, where the salvation of the soul is at stake, the value and importance of truth rises in an infinite proportion! II. IN WHAT MANNER WE MUST BUY IT. Solomon does not intimate in my text at what rate we must buy the truth, because we cannot buy it too dear. We may be said, then, to buy the truth when we devote our earthly riches to the attainment and diffusion of Christian knowledge. For it has been well remarked, "Riches should be employed for the getting knowledge rather than knowledge for the getting riches." We also buy the truth when we pay attention to the means of obtaining it. Thus, when we diligently search the Holy Scriptures, and make them our chief study, when we pray to God in secret, and when we strictly regard the ordinances of the gospel, we then bestow some pains to know the truth. III. THE DANGER AND GUILT OF SELLING IT. (*John Grose, M.A.*) *The practical value of opinions:—*There is hardly anything so plain in respect to human duty, that a wrong state of moral feeling may not cause it to be doubted, or even to be denied. It is an every-day occurrence to hear the value of truth disputed. The usual form is this—"It is no matter what a man believes if his life is only right." The assertion sounds familiar and trite, yet on examination it will appear to be one of the most glaring and self-evident of falsehoods. To act right without knowledge is hardly less a practicable thing than to see without the proper organs. Consider what is necessary to be done in order to prove the position true that it is no matter what a man believes on religious subjects if his life be right. It must be shown either—1. That there are no certain truths pertaining to religion; or else—2. That these truths have no necessary connection with the conduct of men; or—3. That the consequences of their conduct, whether right or wrong, will be the same. Our conclusion is, that it is not to be expected that the conduct, the lives of men, will be materially better than their opinions; by opinions understanding the actual living convictions of their minds. It is therefore an imperative duty to set a high value upon truth in our religious thinking. Religious opinions should not only be firmly fixed; they should also be right opinions. (*R. Palmer, D.D.*) *Buy the truth, and sell it not:—*In every subject there is a "truth" somewhere. The original of "truth"—the mould in which it is all first cast—must be the mind of God. But, how do these great archetypes of the mind of God reach and impress themselves upon the mind of man? First, God has given us revelation to be their reflector. But because the most important "truth" of all truths to us is how a sinner can be saved—how a just God can forgive a rebel—therefore, as Christians, we generally call the gospel "the truth." And well it deserves the name! But the teaching of one who had a right to speak, from the largest experience, perhaps, that any man had, is, that "truth" is hard to get and difficult to retain. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." And what is the cost of "truth"? You must get out of the littlenesses and narrownesses of party feeling. You must go high enough to have large views of things. Next, you must feel and act as an infant in intellect, being conscious of weakness and ignorance—even in your strongest point; willing to be taught. Whatever your talent may be, you can never purchase "truth" but by fag. There must be a real expenditure of hard work. And you must build up carefully, accurately, systematically; taking nothing for granted. And your prayers must not be easy, common-place things. But now, I would suppose that the contract is complete, and that, with the necessary expenditure—much effort and much prayer—you have bought the "truth,"—some "truth"—little it may be, but real and genuine. Let me give you a caution. "Truth" is a precious treasure. But where there is a

treasure there the robbers will come! And they will come very deceptively. Not by force, but by artifice. And they will pretend to "buy." But the bargain is ruinous! For it is one thing to "buy," and it is another thing to "sell"; and men often will give us very little for that for which we have given a great deal! It will be a bad bargain if you sell "truth" at any price. But many things will lure you. It may be a little love of making an excitement, which will tempt you to exaggerate the "truth"; and if you exaggerate it, you have well-nigh lost it. Or it may be a love of popularity, which makes you wish to please every one with whom you are, and therefore to accommodate your views to everybody; and you pare off a little on the one side, and you add a little on the other side, till the whole shape and character is changed, and the "truth" comes out no "truth" at all. Or it may happen that "truth," which you feel to be "truth," stands in the way of your worldly interest, and you are tempted to sacrifice it on the altar of fame or mammon. Or the prejudices of your social position, or your professional ideas, lead you to view and present "truth" under such a medium as shall altogether misrepresent and well-nigh pervert it. Or mere indolence may creep over you, and you may give away to carelessness what you once obtained by so great an outlay! And it often takes as much to keep "truth" as it does to get it. A little worldliness, a little frittering of pleasures, will enervate the very fibre of "truth." And still more and more solemnly, one vice can emasculate all "truth." If a man continue in sin, the "truth" must go. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Bartering for eternity*:—Some of the characteristics of a wise spiritual merchant. 1. He will not neglect to take an account of stock. 2. He will be on his guard against burglars. 3. He will watch the state of the markets. 4. He will be careful to get a profit out of everything that passes through his hands. 5. He will not take any unnecessary risks. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *The preciousness of the truth*:—This statement is not to be understood in a literal or commercial sense. Following the figure that is here used, see—I. THAT THE TRUTH OUGHT TO BE CAREFULLY EXAMINED. No wise man buys an article without looking very closely into it. There is no good thing but has its counterfeits and imitations. The article we are here advised to purchase is admitted to be the most valuable of all things, and it is therefore the last thing that should be taken on trust. That it is liable to be perverted and debased we all know. The great Teacher did not require His hearers to take His declarations upon trust. He courted and even demanded inquiry. The principle of private judgment may be abused. II. THE TRUTH HAS TO BE APPRAISED. A careful estimate of its value has to be formed. It is offered only on one condition—the sacrifice, or at least the free surrender of all we have. III. TO COMPLETE THE TRANSACTION WE MUST CLOSE WITH THE TERMS ON WHICH THE ARTICLE IS OFFERED. The truth is a system of doctrine and discipline, which needs to be carefully studied, thoroughly grasped, and diligently improved. IV. THE TRUTH CAN NEVER BE SOLD, EXCEPT AT A SERIOUS LOSS. It may be sold or sacrificed—1. From a spirit of mere cowardice. 2. From a feeling of false charity and selfish complaisance. 3. By being accommodated to what is called "the spirit of the age." (*Walter M. Gilroy, D.D.*) *The important purchase and prohibited sale*:—I. THE COMMODITY RECOMMENDED. "The truth." 1. There is doctrinal truth. 2. There is experimental truth. 3. There is practical truth. II. THE COUNSEL GIVEN. "Buy the truth." To obtain the truth we must—1. Come to the mart of truth. 2. Sacrifice the hindrances to truth. 3. Employ the means truth recommends. III. LET THIS PURCHASE BE URGED BY SEVERAL CONSIDERATIONS. 1. From your absolute need of it. 2. From the free and easy mode of its acquisition. 3. From its essential worth. When possessed it must be retained. IV. BY WHOM IS THE TRUTH SOLD. 1. By the mercenary minister. 2. By the temporising professor. 3. By the false speaker. 4. By the flatterer. 5. By the backslider. V. REASONS WHY WE SHOULD NOT SELL THE TRUTH. (*J. Burns, D.D.*) *The cost of religion*:—The Bible contains the truth which we have to buy. He that has a religion that has cost him nothing has a religion that is worth nothing. You cannot be religious without some sacrifice. It costs less in early than in later life. (*E. Birch, M.A.*) *The nature and importance of truth*:—I. WHAT TRUTH IS. By truth, I mean a right apprehension of all those things which tend to promote the happiness of mankind. This includes the idea of all virtuous and religious obligations. Truth, in its utmost latitude, relates to a variety of things which are matters of mere speculation only; and these may afford some pleasure to men of deep thought and learning. But that truth which is the object of all men's concern has a more immediate respect to happiness. And this consists

in a right knowledge of religion and virtue. This shines in practice more than in speculation. Other truths may please the ear, and soothe the fancy; but this improves the judgment, and mends the heart. II. WE SHOULD USE ALL PROPER MEANS TO OBTAIN THE KNOWLEDGE OF TRUTH. It is absolutely requisite that a man should first know, before he can rightly do, what is good; and therefore if the soul of man be ignorant of truth, it must at the same time be destitute of virtue; and if it be destitute of virtue, it is utterly incapable of happiness. Nor is the search after truth less pleasant than profitable. For, in the course of our inquiry, we must contemplate God, nature, and ourselves. In contemplating the Divine Being, what a spacious field of pleasure lies open to the mind! What noble transports must the soul feel from a view of Him, who is the fountain of perfection; in whom dwells beauty, knowledge, truth, wisdom, virtue, and all moral excellence! In the contemplation of nature, we see as it were in perspective an infinite variety of beautiful appearances, and relations of things to each other; all which serve to fill the mind with the most pleasing ideas of beauty, order, and harmony. And in the survey of ourselves we may observe a curious machine consisting of various springs and movements, each of which contributes some pleasure or advantage either to ourselves or others. Again, truth is the most beautiful, as well as pleasant. For all "beauty is truth. Thus, in architecture true proportions make the beauty of a building. In music, true measures make the beauty of harmony; and in poetry, which deals so much in fable, truth still is the foundation: for all fiction is no longer pleasing than while it bears a resemblance with truth." And so, in like manner, the beauty of actions, affections, and characters arises from honesty and moral truth. For what can be more beautiful than just sentiments, graceful actions, regular passions, and agreeable behaviour? Thus nature itself leads to virtue, and truth has a kind of moral magic in it which charms irresistibly. Who, then, would refuse at any rate to purchase the knowledge of truth, which is so pleasant, so beautiful, so advantageous? But in this honest way of merchandising truth, and in all our researches after it, great care must be taken that we are not imposed upon either by ignorant or designing men. Falsehood often courts us under the appearance of truth, as some sort of glittering stones will counterfeit true diamonds. Thus, among some professors of Christianity, superstition counterfeits the name of religion, and many idle ceremonies pass current instead of pure substantial virtue. To prevent this, we should study human nature, and the nature of God, so far as He is discovered to us by the light of reason and revelation. III. When by our faithful endeavours we have gained the truth the text suggests to us, WE SHOULD UPON NO CONSIDERATION PART WITH IT. "Buy the truth, and sell it not." If truth be of so great importance as to have virtue, religion, and even happiness depend upon it, what wise man would ever part with it? For can any equivalent be given for the loss of it? And why should we exchange a greater for a lesser good? In our journey through this world we meet with many rugged ways and difficulties. But truth will lead us safely through all into the wished-for haven. All worldly goods are imperfect and of short duration; but truth is eternal in its original, and will never fail to give complete satisfaction to all who persevere in it. But you will ask, When may we be said to part with the truth? We part with it whenever we let any interest, prejudice, or passion prevail over us, contrary to the dictates of right reason. As, therefore, we value our greatest interest, let us honestly endeavour to know the truth; and let us apply ourselves to all proper means for this purpose, such as reading, conversation, and prayer to God. The same honest diligence which is used in learning other arts and sciences will bring us to the knowledge of all that truth which is necessary for any to know. And God requires no more of us than what our respective capacities and opportunities will allow. (*N. Ball.*) *The merchandise of truth.*—I. THE VALUABLE COMMODITY REQUISITE FOR HUMAN LIFE. Truth is that commodity which feeds the moral life. 1. It is of universal comprehension. 2. It is of common necessity and fitness. 3. It is a thing of common end in life. 4. It is the crown and complement of life. II. THE COMMERCE OF TRUTH. 1. One compartment in the market of truth is acquaintance and fair dealing with ourselves. 2. Communion with the Father of our spirit. 3. Study of the works and words of God. 4. Acquaintance with humanity. 5. Christian means and provision. Truth is cheap at any cost. One condition in the pursuit of truth is a high and holy motive. Another is right use of our powers and opportunities. A third is seeking and following the best. A fourth is submission to the Divine will. Another is perseverance; and another faith. III. THE CONSERVATIVE

DUTY. It is easy in the sale, but difficult to buy. Nothing can compensate for its absence. The sale of truth always means an unjust bargain. (*T. Hughes.*) *Truth should be purchased, but never sold:—*I. THE TRUTH IS A PRECIOUS THING. "Buy the truth." What is truth? It is reality. In contradistinction to all that is fictitious and false. 1. Reality in relation to the chief good. What a number of false theories there are concerning human dignity and human happiness. Truth is the reality of these. 2. Reality in relation to personal conduct. There are hollow men, sham men. Truth makes men real. Brings their conceptions into perfect accord with eternal facts, and their personal conduct into perfect accord with their conceptions. Christ is embodied truth. The preciousness of this truth may be estimated by the influence it has exerted on the race. Intellectual truth is precious, moral truth is more precious, redemptive truth is more precious than all. II. TRUTH TO BE OBTAINED MUST BE PURCHASED. It can only be purchased by—1. Study. 2. Devotion. 3. Labour. 4. Self-surrender. III. Truth once purchased SHOULD NEVER BE SOLD. "Sell it not." Truth can be sold. Judas sold it. It can be sold for power, for fame, for worldly pleasure, &c. "Sell it not." If you sell it, you sell your moral usefulness. You sell your self-respect. You sell your power of conscience. You sell your dignity. Hold it as Daniel, Stephen, and Paul held it. (*Homilist.*) *The highest commerce:—*I. THE IMPORTANCE OF ACQUIRING THE TRUTH. 1. We should make diligent search for it. 2. We should be willing to sacrifice and surrender all for it. 3. Again, truth must be obeyed in order to be made our own. II. THE IMPORTANCE OF RETAINING THE TRUTH. "Sell it not." We should not part with it. 1. Because of its intrinsic value. 2. Because it does not rise and fall in value like other things. The markets of this world are for ever fluctuating, &c. Truth is ever the same. 3. Because it can be appropriated or made our own as nothing else can. "A man's life (well-being) consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Worldly goods are of no value to a man when the last hour comes. But true religion will go with him into adversity, into affliction, and will comfort him even in death. (*D. Morgan.*) *Truth cannot be disposed of without injury:—*Truth is not like a watch-seal, which a man can dispose of without any injury to his character. It is a vital element of character, and thus of happiness; and he who barter it for anything will soon realise that he has not only sacrificed the greater for the less, but given up the chief thing in human nobility and joy. (*T. Carlyle.*)

Ver. 25. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.—*Filial piety:—*Respect and love for parents are not, indeed, the motives which operate with the greatest force upon minds renewed by the Spirit of grace and truth. With such the most powerful incentives to action are those which derive their origin from the relation we sustain to God, the author of life and salvation. It is sometimes the case that an ingenuous youth is more influenced by the recollection of the counsels of a departed father or mother than he would have been by the same counsels had that father or mother not been taken from him; and never, in any circumstances, does filial piety appear more lovely and attractive. I. CULTIVATE A REVERENCE FOR PARENTAL COUNSELS AND AUTHORITY. At no period of their lives are young persons so tempted to disregard parental authority as when they are passing from boyhood to manhood. They are desirous to be thought independent, and capable of directing themselves. They become impatient of restraint, and the advice even of parents whom they both reverence and love is often irksome. Better show your claim to be considered youths of a truly noble and independent spirit by always daring to do what is right, and by always yielding due obedience to parental commands. Despise not a mother's fears, however unfounded they may be. Be it your aim to remove them, not by maintaining that there is no ground for them, but by reverently receiving her admonitions, and conforming yourself to them. II. SEEK WITH ALL EARNESTNESS AFTER TRUTH. To how many a father and mother it would be as life from the dead could they be assured that you were all earnestly seeking the pearl of great price, ready and desirous to purchase it at any cost—at any sacrifice! But do not be indifferent to other truth, truths of physical, ethical, or political science. And always keep to truth as opposed to falsehood, dissimulation, and hypocrisy. The commands of God, the social interests of men, the very existence of civil society, call for an unwavering adherence to truth. Attend also to truth in the sense of fidelity, sincerity, and punctuality in keeping promises. III. SEEK AFTER "WISDOM, INSTRUCTION, AND UNDERSTANDING." These different terms were employed not so much for the purpose of exact discrimination,

as to indicate the earnestness with which they should be sought. Be it your aim to make all possible advances in both human and Divine knowledge, but especially in the latter. IV. SEEK THE COMPANY OF THE WISE AND GOOD, SELECTING FOR ASSOCIATES ONLY THOSE WHO ARE DISTINGUISHED FOR SOBRIETY OF CONDUCT. Your associations, of whatever kind they be, cannot fail to exert an influence over you. If your companions be the wise and good, you cannot but receive advantage from the connection. V. BE CAREFUL IN YOUR CHOICE OF BOOKS. Such is the constitution of our minds that everything we read makes an impression upon them. As is your reading so are you. VI. CHERISH VIRTUOUS SENTIMENTS AND VIRTUOUS HABITS. That your sentiments may be virtuous, you must give yourselves to the study of virtue. (*John Maclean, D.D.*)

Ver. 26. **My son, give Me thine heart.**—*The heart a gift for God*:—I. LOVE PROMPTS THIS REQUEST OF WISDOM. 1. Only love seeks after love. We care not to be loved by those whom we do not love. When God asks human love it is because God is love. It is an instance of infinite condescension that God should say, "My son, give Me thine heart." The Great Benefactor becomes Himself the petitioner. It must be because of the great love of God that He condescends to put Himself into such a position. 2. It can only be supreme love which leads wisdom to seek after the heart of such poor things as we are. Wisdom must be of a most condescending kind. Only infinite love would come a-wooing to such hearts as ours. For what has God to gain? He is too great for us to make Him greater, too good for us to make Him better, too glorious for us to make Him more illustrious. He can gain nothing—we gain everything by the gift. Yet He does gain a son. II. WISDOM PERSUADES US TO OBEY THIS LOVING REQUEST. To take our hearts and give them up to God is the wisest thing that we can do. 1. Many others crave our hearts, and our hearts will surely go one way or the other. It is well to guard your heart with all the apparatus that wisdom can provide. 2. Wisdom urges to immediate decision, because it is well to have a heart at once occupied and taken up by Christ. III. LET US BE WISE ENOUGH AT ONCE TO ATTEND TO THIS ADMONITION OF WISDOM. When? At once. How? Freely. Do it thoroughly. You cannot give Christ a piece of a heart, for a heart that is halved is killed. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The heart for God*:—Here thou art a giver, God the petitioner, thy heart the gift which He claimeth by the name of a son. Once God required offerings and sacrifices which men were unwilling to give, because it was a dear service of God; but now He saith that the heart is more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices. Thy alms to the poor, thy counsel to the simple, thy inheritance to thy children, thy tribute to Cæsar, but thy heart to God. Not a piece of thy heart, not a room in thy heart, but thy heart. Some have a double heart, but God acknowledgeth only one heart. God doth not require the heart as though He required no more but the heart. The heart carrieth the whole man with it. There is much strife for the possession of man's heart. Unless we feel that we owe it to God we shall but give it against our will. The wise man, picking out the heart for God, spake as though he would set out the pleasantest, and fairest, and easiest way to serve Him, without any grudging or toil or weariness. Touch but the first link, all the rest will follow; so set the heart a-going, and it is like the poise of a clock, which turns all the wheels one way. God's requiring the heart sheweth that all the things of this world are not worthy of it, or even a piece of it. We should serve God for Himself, and not for ourselves, as he which gives his heart doth all for love. God lengtheneth the heart by the name of a Son. Therefore now ask your hearts whose they are, and how they are moved with these words. What shall become of hearts when He who craves them now shall judge them hereafter? (*H. Smith.*) *The Divine request*:—I. THE NATURE OF THIS REQUEST. "Heart" is another term for "soul," or the immortal part of man. The soul of man possesses certain powers or faculties, by which he is enabled to reason, judge, remember, choose, determine, and perform all the acts of rationality. To render the heart to God is—1. To give the understanding to know and contemplate the Divine perfections. The understanding is the leading faculty in the human soul. 2. To offer Him the will. Every man possesses a self-determining power. 3. To surrender the affections to Him. This giving of the heart must be done, in an entire dependence on Divine aid; promptly, cheerfully, entirely, perpetually. II. THE REASONS FOR COMPLYING WITH THE REQUEST. 1. Gratitude. 2. Fidelity. You have promised to do it, resolved to do it. 3. Justice. Every human being is emphatically the property of the Most High. God is the absolute, unalienable proprietor of all. In demanding your heart He asks for that to which

He alone has right. 4. Safety. This depends on being in the holy keeping of God. 5. Self-interest. Here your duty and interest go hand in hand. Inferences: (1) That nothing will be acceptable with God where the heart is withheld. (2) That God uses all conceivable methods to induce men to give Him their hearts. (3) Everything in religion, on the part of man, must be voluntary. (*R. Treffry.*)

God's appeal to man.—I. THE HUMAN HEART IS NOT BY NATURE IN GOD'S POSSESSION. This fact is sustained—1. By man's actions. Man's actions in his unregenerated state prove that his heart is not under the control of the Divine. Man in this condition has no sympathy with the truths, realities, principles, and pleasures of the blessed gospel of God. 2. By the experience of the good of all ages. 3. By the testimony of God's Word. II. GOD DESIRES POSSESSION OF THE HUMAN HEART. This desire of God—1. Is founded on judicial ground. It is only right that God should have the heart. We are not our own; He who made us has an inalienable right to all we have and are. "He bought us with the precious blood of Christ." 2. Is founded on filial relation—"My son, give Me thine heart." God and man are near relations; man is the offspring of the Divine. 3. Is founded on God's love to man. God's love to man prompted Him to make this appeal. He desires his heart that He may enlighten it with His Spirit, cleanse it with the blood of His Son. III. GOD DESIRES A WILLING POSSESSION OF THE HUMAN HEART—"My son, give Me thine heart." God says, "Give Me thine heart" wholly, voluntarily, unreservedly, gratefully, and believingly. 1. That God does not exercise compulsion on man's will—"Give Me thine heart." God recognises man's free agency. 2. The dignity of man recognised by God. Man's consent is necessary. 3. The glory of the Divine character. If God would compel man to serve Him and surrender to Him his heart, his service would not render any glory to God; the service would be void of virtue. (*J. O. Griffiths.*)

God's request and man's duty.—Take the words as those of a greater than Solomon. I. WHY DOES GOD MAKE ANY REQUEST OF MAN? God loves a voluntary offering, a willing surrender from such a creature as man. A man is able to disobey. God is pleased when man yields Him a hearty and willing obedience. II. WHAT IS THE REQUEST GOD MAKES OF MEN. "Give Me thine heart." Heart is another name for the affections, and the affections are as essential a part of every man as his intellect or his will. God says, "Give Me thy supreme love." Here is a demand which few men comply with, which none in their natural state comply with. Men will give God everything except their hearts. This is a request concerning which some people stand in doubt whether they ought to comply with it. III. WHY DOES GOD MAKE THIS REQUEST OF MAN? 1. Because the heart is the most valuable thing we have. 2. Where the heart is given, everything else will follow. 3. The heart can never be happy until it is given to God. So that God makes this request not for any selfish reason, but in the greatest goodness, and the most God-like loving-kindness. IV. HOW DOES GOD MAKE THIS REQUEST OF MAN? In various ways. He does it by all the comforts of our present life. He does it by experience of the sorrows of life. In the Cross of Jesus this request is uttered. (*Francis Tucker, B.A.*)

Giving the heart.—I. THE COMMAND. 1. Its nature. "Thy heart"—the centre of thought and life. 2. Its extent. Includes the will, strength, love. 3. Its reasonableness. II. THE OBSTACLES. 1. Its singularity. 2. The tendency of human nature—to flee from, instead of drawing nigh to Him. 3. The world's temptations. 4. The influence of Satan. III. ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. God's love. 2. God's invitation. 3. Our desolate condition. IV. HELPS. 1. Earnestness. 2. Carefulness. 9. Jealous regard. 4. Prayer, and the means of grace. (*Homilist.*)

The Divine requisition.—I. EXPLAIN THE TEXT. 1. Men do not naturally give their hearts to God. 2. God will not force us to comply with the demand. 3. To give the heart implies—(1) That we heartily renounce all that God has forbidden. (2) A hearty belief in the fulfilment of all the promises. (3) That we seek and cleave to God constantly as our portion. II. ENFORCE THE TEXT. 1. It is just and right. 2. Our interest requires it. III. NOW, WHAT ANSWER will you give my Lord to the text? 1. "Oh," say some, "I gave it long since. I am only sorry I did not give it before, and sorry I have so often backslidden in heart; but to whom shall I go?" 2. "Yes," says another, "I desire and endeavour to do it; but what a struggle for life!" Do not despair; lift it up as thou art able, and "if darkness endure for a night, joy shall come in the morning"; the Lord is nigh thee; He can loosen thy heart. Look up—the day of redemption draweth nigh. 3. "Yes," says another—"my heart? Do you desire that? Ask for my money, my tongue, my voice, my feet, my hands, anything and everything but that. It is otherwise engaged." My Master has not left a power in my commission to com-

promise it; He will not take aught else. 4. "Yes," says another, "by His help I will; it is right. I cannot be safe without, and it is kind He seeks it. But when? Tomorrow—to-night is impossible; in a very short time I will." I doubt thou wilt perish for ever! (*J. Summerfield, M.A.*) *The surrender of the heart to God:—*

I. THE REASON WHY THE SURRENDER OF THE HEART IS INDISPENSABLY REQUIRED. 1. Nothing less is worthy the acceptance of Him who knows the most hidden purposes of the mind. 2. God alone can satisfy the heart. 3. None but God can renew or sanctify the heart, and thereby prepare it for the holiness of heaven. II. IN WHAT MANNER THIS NECESSARY COMMAND CAN BE COMPLIED WITH. III. THE HAPPY EFFECTS THAT WILL FOLLOW FROM A PROMPT AND UNIVERSAL OBEDIENCE. The morality of the gospel is founded on the basis of gratitude and the efficacious principle of love to God. A sense of His pardoning love and favour will be the completion of our wishes, the source of our joys, and the very foretaste of heaven. (*John Grose, M.A.*) *On giving the heart to God:—*

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY GIVING GOD OUR HEART. "Give Me all thine affections. Let Me be their object, let Me be the centre where they all meet. Give Me thy hope, thy fear, thy joy, thy desire, thy love, thy delight. Hate that which I hate; love what I command; desire what I promise. Rejoice in hope of My favour; fear My wrath; delight to do My will. Let all the powers of thy mind, under the influence of these affections, be given to Me. Let thine understanding be employed in comprehending and admiring My works, and ways; thy conscience in approving and disapproving according to My holy will; thy will in yielding an implicit conformity to Mine; thy memory in retaining the instructions and consolations of My Word." II. HOW REASONABLE IT IS TO GIVE GOD OUR HEART. If a fellow-creature is entitled to our affections because of his moral excellences, how much more God, who possesses these excellences in infinite perfection! III. HOW BLESSED IT IS TO GIVE GOD OUR HEART. IV. HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO GIVE GOD OUR HEART. Without giving the heart to God all our works are only varnished sins, splendid vices, pleasing abominations. And further, it is the giving of the heart to God that prepares us for a better world. V. HOW WE MAY BE ENABLED TO GIVE GOD OUR HEART. (*Miles Jackson.*) *The surrender of the heart to God:—*

God is to exercise lordship over all the capacities and volitions of the soul; over all our spiritual, moral, and intellectual powers. I. THE NATURE, EXTENT, AND REASONABLENESS OF THIS COMMAND. It implies a clear and enlightened understanding of the things of God, especially the gospel method of salvation. The command is reasonable in view of the relations of God to us. II. DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING THIS SURRENDER. Such as affect the young. Temptations of young manhood. Trials and evils of school experience. Entering business. Forms of recreation. Directions: 1. Be in earnest. 2. If you have given God your heart take care what goes in and what comes out of it. 3. Look well to whom beside you give any share of your heart. 4. Beware of carelessness in secret devotion. 5. Keep up attendance on holy ordinances. (*Daniel Moore, M.A.*) *The gift of the heart to God (to young men):—* The heart is never truly ours until we have given it away. Until we have put it in some hand, or laid it upon some altar, we never fully realise its possession, never feel its power, never know its capacities, never understand how profound are its wants, nor how sublime are its aspirations. No man can live an earnest, social, or spiritual life, and keep his heart unto himself. And sooner or later the heart will be given either to some purpose, or to some object, or to some idol, or to God. Because of this necessity in the heart to belong to some object, the clamour for it is great. The applicants positively throng up the path of life. Fashion is there, and Pleasure is there, and Fame is there, and Knowledge is there, and all that fascination and subtlety and loud-sounding promises can do they import into their appeals. But a voice of tenderness and authority speaks to us from above, "My son, give Me thine heart." This appeals to us by the simple majesty of right. God's right to the heart lies in this—1. He created that heart. And His request tells us at once of God's right and of man's freedom. 2. He has bestowed, and is bestowing, continually upon it His care. Home and friendships, and the myriad bright hopes of life, testify that we have a Father in our God. God has been watching over your life, arranging with His wisdom and forethought and love the interests of your soul, and for all this care and anxious fatherhood, He asks this return, "My son, give Me thine heart." 3. He has provided redemption for it. We are not our own, we are bought with a price. In asking for the heart God asks for that which controls the life—for your love, your supreme love, your undivided love. God does not want your service without your heart. Reasons why your heart should be given

to God now: (1) Because God alone can justify it. (2) Because of the ten thousand snares which it will save you. (3) Because the longer the gift is delayed the less probable is it that it will be ever given at all. Let it be a definite act; on your part a solemn consecration. (*Henry Wonnacott.*) *God requires the heart:—*

I. THE RELATION. "My son." He speaks here, and not to a stranger—to a son (Eph. ii. 19). A son, not a slave. A son; thou wert not always so (Eph. ii. 1-4, 13; 1 John iii. 2). A son; therefore, in a way of gratitude and mutual affection, give thy heart to thy Father. II. THE MANNER OF YIELDING UP THE HEART TO GOD. It is here expressed by a way of giving. 1. Give it cheerfully (2 Cor. ix. 7). 2. Presently (2 Cor. vi. 2; Heb. iv. 7). 3. Give it; do not lend it only. Many lend their hearts under a sermon, like those in Ezek. xxxiii. 32. God is pleased to call that a gift which indeed is a debt (Rom. viii. 12, xii. 1). III. TO WHOM THE HEART MUST BE GIVEN. 1. Not to the creature (Matt. x. 37). 2. Not to the world (2 Tim. iv. 10; 1 John. ii. 15). 3. Not to Satan (Eph. ii. 2). 4. Not to sin (chap. i. 10). 5. Give it to Him who gave Himself for thee (Gal. ii. 20). IV. THE GIFT ITSELF. "The heart." 1. Not the outward man only, not the body only: God dwells not so much in these temples as in broken and contrite spirits. He doth not here ask for the shell, but the kernel; not for the casket, but for the jewel. 2. Not in appearance, but in reality. 3. Not a part, but the whole. God is like the true mother (1 Kings iii. 26). 4. Give thine heart, *i.e.*, all the powers and faculties of thy soul. To conclude: 1. Because it is His due. He is the maker, the purchaser (1 Cor. vi. 20); the spouse (Hos. ii. 19). 2. It is pleasing and acceptable to Him. He asks it; it is all thou canst give Him. It is a comprehensive gift. He that gives the heart will give all things (Rom. viii. 32). 3. All performances without the heart will be rejected (Amos v. 21, 22). 4. Give thine heart to God: if it be a hard heart, He will make it new (Deut. xxx. 6; Ezek. xxxvi. 26). (*T. Hannam.*) *First give the heart to God, and then delight will follow:—*Would it not be much more natural to reverse the order? First, learn to delight in God's ways, and the more we rejoice in them the more easily we may learn to love Him, to give Him our heart. So it would seem love will grow out of delight. But how wise is God's order! First the heart, then delight. For the second is, in reality, only possible when the first has been accomplished. Thousands strive to find pleasure in the ways of God, but because they have not yet given their heart to Him, because they still go their own ways, and God crosses those ways again and again, they only get as far as to bow their heads in a kind of dull resignation under some Divine visitation; but they never delight in all God's ways; they never attain to a comforting hope which even in dark days does not cast away its confidence, and which has so great a reward. Oh, examine thyself, whence comes it that thou hast so often murmured at God's ways, hast felt thyself hardly dealt with, and couldst not forgive Him that He did not lead thee by another way, that He took this away from thee and left that, when thou wouldst have chosen the contrary? It comes from this—thou hast not given thy whole heart to God! Only when thy heart shall rest in Him, and in His peace, will it be contented with all His dispensations. (*T. Christlieb, D.D.*) *Giving the heart to God a reasonable duty:—*Mankind are reasonable creatures, and the religion which God enjoins upon them is a reasonable service. But it has always been found extremely difficult to reason with men upon religious subjects. God here speaks with paternal affection and authority. I. EXPLAIN THE PRECEPT IN THE TEXT. 1. It implies the exercising of love to God. To love, and to give the heart, signify the same thing. 2. It implies loving God for what He is in Himself. Men may love God for His favours, without loving His true character. 3. It implies loving God supremely. He is the Supreme Being, He possesses supreme natural and moral excellences; and to love Him for these is to love Him supremely. II. THE REASONABLENESS OF COMPLYING WITH THIS DIVINE INJUNCTION. Consider—1. That we are the offspring of God. 2. He is infinitely worthy of the love of all mankind. 3. The conduct, as well as the character, of God makes giving Him our hearts reasonable. 4. This will afford us the highest happiness that we are capable of enjoying. 5. There is really nothing to hinder us from thus giving our hearts. Improvement: (1) It is reasonable that all men should be really religious. (2) Not reasonable to think hardly of God if He rejects services when hearts are withheld. (3) It is reasonable to exhort men to exercise supreme love to God immediately. (4) Every scheme of religion which keeps hearts from God is unreasonable. (5) It is most unreasonable to withdraw hearts from God when they have once been given. (*N. Emmons, D.D.*) *The hearts of young people demanded for God:—*The subject

to consider is not the giving of your hearts to God, in opposition to hypocrisy and mere devotion, but the giving your hearts, that is, yourselves, to Him, preferably to all other competitors for your affection. Many will be courting your youthful affections, and endeavouring to engage your hearts to them—the world, the flesh, the devil, vain and wicked companions. I. WHO HAS THE GREATEST CLAIM TO YOUR HEARTS? Consider the equity and reasonableness of the demands of God, your Creator and Redeemer. Contrast with the pretensions of the devil, the world or the flesh. II. WHERE MAY YOU BESTOW YOUR HEARTS WITH THE GREATEST ADVANTAGE?

1. Suppose that the world and the flesh are able, at present, to make good their specious promises, what will come when the transitory pleasures are passed away? 2. Even with regard to this life, the advantage is far from being so much on their side as they would make you believe. The insinuations that religion will make you unhappy are mere calumnies that stand confuted by a thousand experiences to the contrary. The devil, the world, and the flesh promise you indeed riches, honour, and abundance of pleasures, but they promise what it is not in their power to give. Motives urging to the immediate surrender of the heart to God are—

1. This will be particularly acceptable to God and the Redeemer. 2. It will be singularly comfortable and advantageous to yourselves. 3. If you refuse God your hearts now, perhaps hereafter it will be too late to offer them. 4. Consider what the refusal of your hearts to God implies in it. 5. Think how you will answer your refusal at the great day. (*John Oakes.*) *The gift of the heart:*—If we would have any of our offerings find favour in the eyes of God our hearts must go with them. It is the heart which is challenged and demanded; withhold that, and you withhold all. The wise man uses the word “heart” in its fullest sense. Sometimes it only denotes some one particular faculty of the soul, the understanding or the will or the affections. Here it includes the whole mind, spirit, and soul. All these the Lord claims. This is a very comprehensive claim. The best way to comply with it is to identify God with everything which will bear contact with Him. Nothing will bear this contact but what He has constructed and ordained. A life thus controlled and regulated would be indeed a blessed and a model life. Nothing could take one whose life was thus regulated by surprise. God demands your heart that He may enlighten, convince, pardon, sanctify, keep, dignify, and save you. We press for this surrender on the ground of right, for your heart belongs to Him who challenges the surrender; on the ground of reason, for your heart was formed for Him who claims it; on the ground of gratitude, for no other has such claims on you. We might press it on the ground of self-interest. God is ready to take possession if you are ready to yield. Then give your heart to Him humbly, believingly, unreservedly, cheerfully, irrevocably. (*A. Mursell.*)

The gift for God (to the young):—I. WHAT IT MEANS TO GIVE GOD OUR HEARTS. II. WHY WE SHOULD GIVE OUR HEARTS TO GOD. 1. Because He has the best right to them. 2. Because He can make the best use of them. He can make them new. He can make them clean. He can make them happy. (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *A gift God asks (to the young):*—I. GOD ASKING SOMETHING. God who is continually giving to us all, is here asking for something. II. FROM WHOM HE ASKS IT. Not from any one great, but from us. III. WHAT HE ASKS. We could not give Him the things we have, for they are His already. He asks for yourself. IV. WHY HE ASKS IT. This you may learn from the name He gives you. “My son.” You are even by nature precious to God. (*C. A. Salmond, M.A.*) *Heart in religion:*—In this text God speaks to man and asks for his heart. I. THE DIVINE REQUEST. 1. Sincerity. A man is said to be sincere when he engages his heart in any work. And God asks for sincerity. He will not be satisfied with a bare profession. 2. Earnestness. When a man is in earnest about anything we say his heart is in it. So when God asks for the heart He means us to be in earnest. He hates indifference. 3. Entire devotion. “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” &c. 4. Delight. Whatever a man engages his heart in he is said to delight in. Some men set their heart upon earthly things, and find in them their chief delight. II. THE NATURE OF THE REQUEST. “My son, give Me.” 1. It is an affectionate request. All God’s wooing breathes forth an air of affectionate regard for the welfare of man. 2. It is a reasonable request. (*Homilist.*) *Characteristics of a great love:*—1. It likes to be with the object of its affection. 2. There is the presence of a desire to serve the object of its affection. Love is tireless in ministry. It is always giving itself away. 3. It desires union with its object in thought, if not in body. Love never journeys unaccompanied by love. 4. The chief characteristic of love is its unselfishness. Is your love for God unselfish, or do you love Him only as a means of

securing His favour? Your duty is to set yourself to apprehend God. To know Him is to love Him, and your not loving Him shows that you do not know Him. The question which concerns your highest happiness, here and hereafter, is not touching technicalities of creed, of ceremony, of intellectual interpretation of selected passages out of God's Word. The supreme question is, Do you love God? (*W. H. Murray.*) *The heart given to God:—*I. Consider the QUESTION OF RIGHT AND JUSTICE. God demands you for Himself; the Lord Jesus Christ claims your heart. In opposition to them are ranged sin and Satan, the world and the flesh, the vain, the worldly, and the profligate. Can you hesitate as to the justice of these opposing claims? "Behold," saith God, "My hands have made thee and fashioned thee. My visitation hath since preserved thy soul in life. Thou hast lived on the provisions of My bounty. Thou hast indeed provoked Me with thy sins, yet have I borne with thee. Nay, I have sent My only begotten Son to redeem and save thee." Hear, also, the Lord Jesus Christ urge His claim upon you. "I left the bosom of My Father, and united Myself to flesh and blood, that I might suffer and die for thee, when thou wast lost beyond recovery by any human power." And now what are the pretensions which the devil, the world, and the flesh can make to your affections that will admit for one moment to be set against these powerful claims? What have they done; what can they do for you? They deceive, they ensnare, they corrupt, they defile, they trouble, they ruin you; but they neither will nor can promote your real good. II. CONSIDER ON WHOM YOU MAY BESTOW THEM WITH THE GREATEST ADVANTAGE. And here I must confess that the world and the flesh have more to say for themselves than under the former head. Right and title they have none at all; but they promise you much in the way of interest and advantage. Under their guidance, they tell you, you will enjoy a life of pleasure and ease, free from the restraints of religion; you will have unbounded liberty of conduct, and withhold your eyes from no joy; whereas religion is an irksome and melancholy service. 1. I will suppose, for the sake of argument, that the world and the flesh are able to make good all their promises. Delightful prospect! Yes, but how long is it to last? You are to enter into another world, and to appear at the bar of God, there to give an account of your conduct. Had you given your hearts to God, He would now have opened the kingdom of heaven to you, and given you a share in its everlasting pleasures. Your choice has been different, and you now reap the fruits of it. Is it, then, worth while to purchase the short-lived pleasures of sin at so dear a rate as this? 2. Supposing, therefore, that the world and the flesh were able to make good those promises by which they estrange your hearts from God, even then it would be the height of madness to listen to them. But this is far from being the case. On the contrary, the ways of religion will be found to be eminently ways of pleasantness, as well as its end peace. There is nothing truly desirable, even in this life which the servants of God are not as likely to partake of as any other persons whatsoever. Religion is friendly to health, and, generally speaking, to reputation. The idea, therefore, that religion tends to make men unhappy is a mere calumny. The truth is, the devil, the world, and the flesh promise you what it is not in their power to give. For even the good things of this life are distributed by the providence of God, and without His leave you cannot enjoy the meanest comfort. But if you give your hearts to God, He will certainly bestow as much of those things upon you as His wisdom knows to be best for you. Since, then, the cause of piety has thus plainly the advantage, you will be inexcusably blind to your own interest if you give not your hearts to God. Thus, if God spare your lives, you will be fitted to be eminently useful in the world; or if you die at an early age, you will be prepared to meet death, and to bid it welcome. Consider what the refusal of your hearts to God implies. You in effect say, "I dislike His service; I disown His title to me; I can place my affections on better objects; I desire to have nothing to do with God." This is the plain language of your conduct. (*Christian Observer.*) **And let thine eyes observe My ways.**—*Observation:—*Observation is the earliest preceptor of infants, and the grown-up man's every-day guide. The infant learns to prattle, and to utter those sounds so endearing to its parents, by hearing those around it repeat them; it observes the sounds, and imitates them. We cannot learn from nature except by observation. She has indeed a voice which speaks loudly and continuously to the ears of all who will listen. She has a school in which all who will may learn. It was observation in Newton which led to the discovery of the laws of gravitation. He observed the apple fall, and reasoned on it. But, had he not observed the falling body, he might never have discovered what is so useful for us to know. It was observation on the part of Galvani's wife which

led to the knowledge of galvanism and electricity. She observed the legs of some frogs to twitch, on which her husband was experimenting. She marked the fact and the result was the discovery of that useful and all-pervading agency, electricity. The value of the discovery has of late been more forcibly impressed on us by the successful laying of the Atlantic telegraph, by which distant countries, separated by seas of vast extent and great depth, are brought into almost momentary connection. It was observation which led to the discovery of glass. Sand and flint were accidentally melted together on the seashore, and the result was a transparent substance which we call glass, and which in cold countries like our own is so invaluable in lighting our homes, while the chilly air is kept outside. It was observation on the part of the architect, Smeaton, which led to the successful building of the Eddystone lighthouse. Two buildings had been previously erected on that fatal rock; the one was burnt, and the other blown down. He observed that the form of the oak-tree seemed the strongest in nature. He acted on this, and built the lighthouse after the model of an oak-tree's trunk. Its continuance for so many years proves the truth of his deduction. (*Church of England Magazine.*)

Vers. 29-35. **They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.**—*The woes of the drunkard*:—The ugly sketch given here should be enough to warn all young people against tampering with a vice which may make it a portrait of them. The questions, six in number, fall into three pairs, which deal respectively with the man's feelings of discomfort, his relations with others, and his physical sufferings. Who is the original of this foul picture of degradation and misery? The answer is keenly sarcastic. It is the man who "lingers long over the wine." The loss of the power of self-control is indicated in the term. If we would only realise the "afterwards" of any vice, we should turn from it with dread. The misfortune is, that we do not look an inch beyond the present pleasure. Note three degrading effects of drunkenness. 1. The effect in deceiving the senses and lowering the moral tone. 2. The common sense, the instinct of self-preservation, ordinary prudence, and the sense of the fitness of things, are suspended. 3. The last piece of degradation is given, for greater liveliness of impression, in the form of the drunkard's own soliloquy. He feels himself all over as he begins to rouse from his tipsy sleep, and pities himself that he has been so badly handled. He is waking, but he is not yet himself. As he staggers back into consciousness, the first thing that he thinks of is a renewal of his debauch. The awful tyranny of the evil habit, which has become a diseased second nature, is only too well known. (*A. MacLaren, D.D.*) *Returning from evil ways*:—The first difficulty in the way of return for the intemperate, who have got on the wrong tack, is the force of moral gravitation. It is easier to go down than it is to go up. The next thing is the power of evil habit. If a man wants to return from evil practices, society repulses him. How may these obstacles be overcome? 1. Throw yourself on God. 2. Quit all your bad associations. 3. Seek Christian advice. If you have a Christian friend, go to him. (*T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.*) *Against intemperance*:—As implied in this passage this indicates the tendency of human nature. 1. The moral degradation of intemperance. It is the destruction of everything manly and noble in human nature. 2. The physical degradation. Corruption in the heart works out its marks upon the face and in the manners. A distinguished German authority has given the scientific degradation resulting upon the generations succeeding the victim of the drink habit. 3. The social degradation. Intemperance as an evil reaches the state. Nine-tenths of the crimes of society result from, or are abetted by, drink. This theme is a warning. Directly and indirectly, the appeal is made to all who come within the sound of its voice. (*D. O. Mears.*) *Drunkenness*:—I. THE EVILS OF DRUNKENNESS. 1. Sorrow (ver. 29). Drink has probably broken more hearts than any other thing. It is taken to drown sorrow, but, alas! it creates it. 2. Folly. "Babbling"—a profanation of the sacred gift of speech, and as such is to be avoided (1 Tim. vi. 20). 3. Disease. "Wounds." Look in at the hospitals. Read the medical reports. 4. Disfigurement. "Redness of the eyes." 5. Waste of time. "Tarry long." 6. Dissatisfaction. "Yet again" (ver. 35). Drink creates an insatiable appetite for itself. 7. Insensibility. "Felt it not" (ver. 35). The nerves of the drunkard are benumbed, and nature's monitors are impaired. Physical insensibility is followed by moral insensibility (Eph. iv. 19). 8. Uncleanliness. Drink fires the passions, and gives the "strange women" (ver. 33) their best opportunities. 9. Exposure to danger (ver. 34). II. THE REMEDY FOR DRUNKENNESS (ver 31). It is very simple. Abstain from strong drink—don't even

look at it. Temptation sometimes enters through the eye. But beyond and above all look to Jesus for deliverance from this and every other form of evil. (*H. Thorne.*)

Pleasant vices dangerous :—Gas is a great spoiler of the air; but it has the merit of giving timely warning of the danger by the horrible smell which accompanies its escape. This smell is perceptible when there is only one part in a thousand parts of air; becomes very offensive when the proportion is $\frac{1}{350}$ or $\frac{1}{500}$, and is almost insupportable as the proportion increases. If the gas has escaped from a crack in the pipes, and been allowed to mingle with the air in which a free circulation by ventilation is possible, so that the proportion of gas amounts to $\frac{1}{11}$, it explodes on the introduction of a candle. But the reason why this catastrophe so seldom occurs is because the smell of gas is so utterly offensive that the evil demands and receives proper attention long before it reaches danger point. This fact illustrates very well a great truth in the moral world, namely, that when evil is offensive in itself its danger to the community is slight. In exact ratio to the pleasantness of vice is the danger to be apprehended from it. (*Scientific Illustrations.*)

A temperance topic :—1. The use of intoxicating drinks is financially unbusiness-like. It keeps men in poverty, and they keep their families in the deepest want. 2. It destroys self-respect. 3. It defiles the body. 4. It destroys life. 5. It enfeebles the mind. 6. It breaks down the will. 7. It obliterates heart and conscience. 8. It destroys souls. Let us use our every influence to correct this evil. (*G. B. F. Hallcock.*)

On the sin of drunkenness :—I. THE CAUSES WHICH LEAD TO IT. 1. Example. Seeing others in this state, and imitating them without being aware of the results which will follow. 2. Evil associations. We cannot be too careful in selecting our associates. 3. Afflictions of a peculiar kind, especially mental, and those produced by disappointment. 4. The ease with which liquor is procured. II. SOME OF THE EVILS ATTENDANT UPON DRUNKENNESS. 1. Babbling. Owing to temporary deprivation of the use of reason. 2. Contentions. The man acts like a madman. 3. Wounds without cause. 4. Redness of eyes. III. THE CONSEQUENCES RESULTING FROM THIS SIN. Woe and sorrow. 1. From the consumption of his property. 2. From the loss of his reputation. 3. From the decay of his health. 4. From the injury done to his family. 5. From the loss of his immortal soul. IV. THE DUTY OF AVOIDING THE SIN OF DRUNKENNESS. Think not that it will do you good, but reflect on the consequences to which it leads, so abominable in the sight of God, so injurious to yourselves and those around you, and so hateful in the estimation of all those who truly reflect. (*E. Miller, M.A.*)

Drunkenness :—The Bible considers intemperance in all its phases, and shows that, with all other sins, it springs from a sinfulness which is common to mankind, and shows that the true remedy for it, as for all sins, lies in the deliverance Divinely provided for the sinfulness which is their root. I. THE DRUNKARD'S CONDITION IS DESCRIBED. Woes and sorrows, strifes and anxieties, wounds and diseases, deadened perceptions and a destroyed will, mingle in this awful picture. Here is disclosed a general wreck of manhood. 1. Physical evils. Alcohol vitiates the blood and fills it with poisonous humour. The changes produce gross and enfeebled bodies, diseases of the heart, lungs, and other organs, and a constant waste of physical powers. 2. Mental evils. Alcohol directly affects the brain. It creates an unnatural brilliancy of intellect. But this brief advantage is purchased at the cost of the mind itself. Other effects on the mind seriously deteriorate a man's progeny. Drink destroys not only the mind of the drunkard, but also the mind of his offspring. 3. Moral and spiritual evils. Drunkenness inflames the passions. It leads to contentions. It is the great cause of crime. It destroys self-control and thus overthrows the citadel of manhood. II. THE STEPS BY WHICH MEN BECOME DRUNKARDS. Alcohol is first taken in its simplest, as wine, beer, cider. At first it is taken only occasionally, and at the invitation of others. Literature lends its voice to enticing temptations. Those who allow themselves to acquire the habit of drinking make that which they hate a part of themselves. III. THE WAY TO AVOID BEING A DRUNKARD. Let alcohol alone. Keep in view that the woes of drink come from an indulgence that was moderate in the beginning. No temptation to drink is more dangerous than that which makes it a sign of good-fellowship. Total abstinence is the only safe ground to stand upon. But the Christian will do more than hold himself in safety. The Christian must give all the weight of his influence, by example, word, and action, as a Christian, a neighbour, and a citizen, against this evil. (*Monday Club Sermons.*)

Against intemperance :—I. THE DELUSIVENESS OF THIS SIN. Call no pleasure pleasurable until you have asked what the cost is to be. II. THE TRAITS OF DISPOSITION RESULTING FROM WINE-DRINKING.

1. The drunkard is contentious. 2. He is a discontented man. 3. He loses his mind. 4. He is a reckless man. III. THE RESULTS OF DRINKING ARE IN PART SUGGESTED. 1. The speech of the drunkard is bad. 2. The body is harmed by drink. 3. The drunkard tends to become possessed of all evil desires. IV. THIS WAY OF LIVING BECOMES PERMANENT. In its origin drunkenness is but an episode; in its conclusion it is a character. What a man does once he tends to do again. 1. This permanence is shown in the deliberateness of the drunkard's full-grown folly. 2. And so the habit fastens itself more and more firmly upon him, until at last, even when he is grovelling in the lowest depths, he still calls ever for more of that which has brought him there. The more a man drinks, the more he does not want to stop. (*D. J. Burrell.*) *The woes of the drunkard* :—Is it not Shakespeare himself who says, by the mouth of the disgraced and ruined Cassio, "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee Devil"? What does drink cost in human misery? Ah, how can I tell you? Can I count the leaves of the forest, or the sands upon the shore? And the sounds of this misery are like the sighing of the leaves of illimitable forests, and the plashing on the shores of unfathomable seas. For it is the horrible fact that the drink which we, as a nation, are drinking, not from the necessities of thirst, but from the mere luxuries of appetite—drink often adulterated with the vilest and most maddening ingredients—yes, this rubied and Circean cup which we sip, and smile while it is converting thousands of our brethren into swine—this subtle, serpentine, insidious thing which we cherish in our bosoms, and laugh and play with its brightness, while it is stinging thousands of our brothers into raging madness—costs us millions of money, myriads of criminals, thousands of paupers, thousands of ruined women, hundreds and thousands of men and women goaded by misery, into suicide and madness, with every blossom in what might have been the garland of their lives blighted as by a fury's breath. (*Dean Farrar.*) *Safety imperceptibly passed by the drinker* :—Who can detect the line of demarcation that separates the colours of the rainbow, where the yellow tint blends into the deep orange colour, and that deep orange colour into the deeper red! What mind, however disciplined or practised, can tell the line of demarcation that shades off the varying sentiments of men, and separates the schools of theological opinion? And if the human eye, aided by the most powerful lenses, cannot discern any line of demarcation in the tints of the rainbow, and the skilled theologian cannot pronounce as to where or what is the dividing line between one school of theology and another, how can we expect the dulled, darkened, blunted brain of the drinker to be able to detect that imperceptible line in his progress, at one side of which is safety, and beyond it danger? Or, suppose he could, would it be ethically right for a man to push forward designedly to the furthest verge where he supposed that moral innocence merged into guilt and sin? The rainbow tints may indeed thus meet and blend; phases of thought and opinion may shade off into each other; but it surely can never be that moral innocence and moral guilt could ever stand in such close proximity together as that the one should merge into the other. (*R. Maguire.*) *The warning against intemperance* :—We should mind this warning against the serpent of intemperance, because—**I. ITS STING IS A COSTLY STING.** **II. ITS STING IS AN INJURIOUS STING.** **III. ITS STING IS A DISGRACEFUL STING.** (*R. Newton, D.D.*) *The drink serpent* :—Drink is like the serpent—**I. BECAUSE IT IS POISONOUS.** Alcohol is primarily a brain-poison, but there is not a tissue nor an organ of the body which it does not injure. **II. BECAUSE IT IS SUBTLE** (*Gen. iii. 1*). As a rule men glide into drunkenness unconsciously to themselves. Probably the drunkard is the last person to know that he has become such. **III. BECAUSE IT IS LIKE THE DEVIL.** In the Scriptures the serpent is the symbol of Satan. Drink, like the devil, leads men into all kinds of sin. The connection of drink with unchastity is set forth in this passage. (*G. A. Bennetts, B.A.*) *Description of drunkenness* :—An inferior master in the art of moral painting gives us a just picture of drunkenness in these words. "Drunkenness is a distemper of the head, a subversion of the senses, a tempest of the tongue, a storm in the body, the shipwreck of virtue, the loss of time, a wilful madness, a pleasant devil, a sugared poison, a sweet sin, which he that has, has not himself, and he that commits it, doth not only commit sin, but is himself altogether sin." (*George Lawson, D.D.*) *The drunkard's picture* :—1. His sensual indulgence. 2. His offensive garrulousness. 3. His bloodshot face. The habits of the man come to be marked by their effects upon his looks. 4. His wretched condition. 5. His easy temptability. He is ripe for the crimes of adultery, falsehood, blasphemy, and other enormities. 6. His reck-

less stupidity. 7. His unconquerable thirst. However bitter his reflections upon his awaking, and his remorse, his thirst remains unquenched. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Woes of intemperance*.—The Assyrians had a fancy that, if a demon saw his own face in a mirror, he could not bear the ugly sight, and would vanish. Unfortunately, vicious men are not so easily frightened, for many a drunkard knows perfectly what a degraded creature he has made himself, and yet is not restrained. But the photograph may deter others from beginning so suicidal a course. The appeal to consequences may not be the highest, but it is legitimate, and ought to be powerful with all rational beings. The consequences here appealed to are exclusively personal ones, there being no reference to the drunkards' miserable homes, to wrecked family blessings, nor even to blasted prospects, and the havoc wrought by drink in pauperising and bringing to rags. What it does to the man himself in body and soul is the portrait painter's theme here. The torrent of questions with which he begins brings out the mental discomfort and bodily mischief consequent on intoxication. The two questions in verse 29a repeat the substance of the three in A. "Complaining" seems to include "woe" and "sorrow," and "wounds without cause" are the natural results of the "contentions" equally without cause. According to the best and most recent authorities, the bodily symptom here noticed is dulness, not "redness," of eyes, the glazed, unperceiving stare so sadly well known as a sign of intoxication. There are far more grave physical consequences of the habit than that—shattered nerves, shaking hands, knotted livers—but the painter here is thinking rather of the act than of the habit. His answer to his questions comes with emphasis, and has a dash of sad irony in it. What an epitaph for a man: "He was a connoisseur in wines; he did not know much about science or history or philosophy or theology or art or commerce or morality, but he was a perfect master at blending whisky!" A solemn warning follows the etching of the drunkard, which is bitten in on the plate with acid. The wine appeals to the sense of sight, as it gleams in golden cup or crystal goblet, and it appeals also to the sense of taste as "it goeth down smoothly." But it is not done with when it is swallowed, and, like all delights of sense, it has an "afterwards" which is not delightful. "Violent delights have violent ends." In verse 33 we see him in the height of his excitement; in verse 34, in the stupor that follows; in verse 35, in his waking. The first stage is marked by hallucinations and a torrent of vile speech. "Thine eyes shall behold strange things," by which are meant the absurd delusions of the drunkard. Imagination is stimulated, and the senses befooled, by the fumes; the man reels about in a world of his own creating, which has nothing corresponding to it in reality. There is a still more terrible meaning possible to this part of the picture, though probably not the one intended—namely, the frightful visions accompanying delirium tremens, which dog the drunkard's steps, and drive him into paroxysms of terror. Further, his loss of self-control is signalled by the loose speech in which the rank heart pours itself out in "perverse things." There is a strange and awful connection between intoxication and foul words from the depths of the "evil treasure" of the heart. The second stage is that of collapse and stupor. The excitement, of course, ends in that, and the drunkard flings himself down anywhere, utterly careless of danger, and utterly unconscious of his surroundings. He is like a man that "lieth down in the midst of the sea," neither a comfortable nor a safe bed, "or as he that lieth upon the top of a mast," where there is neither room to lie, nor security as the ship rolls, and the uneasy couch rolls still more. He sleeps out his heavy slumbers, and, when he does, he discovers for the first time the bruises and wounds which he has received. But these do not curb the tyrannous appetite which brought them on him. Undeterred by them, he wishes for the complete return of sober consciousness, only that he may renew his debauch. Christ's solemn saying, "Whoso committeth sin is the slave of sin," has no more tragical exemplification than in the miserable drunkard, who can no more resist the craving for drink than he can stop Niagara. (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 35. *They have beaten me and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*—*Satan's anæsthetic*.—1. The application of anæsthetics to surgery is one of the most beneficent discoveries of the present age. One shudders at the very thought of the surgical operations of the olden days, executed without the merciful drug that makes the patient unconscious of his agony. But almost every good thing in the kingdom of God is travestied in the kingdom of Satan. Satan has therefore his own anodyne which he uses to the ruin of the bodies and souls

of men. It is evident from the proverb that alcohol was known to be an anæsthetic three thousand years ago. Modern science corroborates the ancient saying. Most people know that a man in liquor often appears insensible to wounds which otherwise would cause intense pain. Medical men occasionally use alcohol as an anæsthetic when chloroform is inadmissible. The practical result of this property of alcohol is that the intemperate man—and many a regular “moderate” drinker, too—is unconscious of the gradual deterioration of his bodily frame. The vital organs are becoming diseased and their functions deranged; but meanwhile the process is most rapidly going on in the brain. Hence all the perceptions are dulled, and the painful sensations, that otherwise would give timely warning of the growing mischief, are to some extent unfelt. One of the purposes of pain is to sound a warning note, to give a signal that something is wrong, that some part of the complex mechanism of the body is out of gear. Our duty is, therefore, not to be contented with allaying the pain, but if possible to cure the disease which causes the pain. 2. The moral anæsthesia to which alcohol gives rise is even more terrible than the physical. Acting as a subtle brain-poison, it works sad havoc with the moral perceptions. All delicacy of conscience is quickly lost, the distinctions between right and wrong become blurred, and the man once honoured and trusted becomes a liar, a thief, and an ingrate. The loving, dutiful son becomes selfish, morose, and attacks his mother with murderous violence. Now, in such cases as these (which are, alas! only too common) we cannot believe that the honest man wilfully takes to lying, the affectionate father wilfully becomes the savage brute, or the dutiful son is filled wilfully with a fierce hatred of his mother. Evidently the mind, conscience, and will become diseased. Alcohol not only dulls the sense of pain in the physical system; it is an anæsthetic that dulls the mind so as to produce unconsciousness of the moral havoc that is being made. The unhappy being loses his power of truthfulness, and yet is hardly conscious that he is a liar. It should be remembered that absolute drunkenness is not always necessary to produce such results. The free and regular use of alcoholic beverages, though stopping short of intoxication, will assuredly produce more or less injury to the body and degradation of the mind and will, both in the drinker and in his children. Let us beware lest we even in the least degree impair these God-like qualities with which we have been endowed. 3. The last words of the text express what we are accustomed to call the “drink crave.” When intoxication is over, and all the misery and depression that are the after-results of excess are felt, then the unhappy victim of the drink-habit says in effect, if not in the actual words of the text, “I will seek it yet again.” The man who is always strictly moderate in his use of alcohol then steps in and says, “But why are you so foolish as to seek it again? Has it not done you enough harm already? Why not leave it alone?” But if he knew into what a state the poor drunkard had fallen—a state of both physical and mental degradation—he would not talk so glibly. First of all, the drink-crave has a physical basis. Certain of the vital organs are so affected and in such distress that the overpowering crave for drink is as natural, under the circumstances, as the craving of an excessively hungry man for food. Inebriety becomes, in fact, an actual and terrible bodily disease, not easily to be cured. Further than that, the mind of the inebriate is so obscured that he does not realise his fall as do those about him. The horror of his position does not appear to him. Strange and sad to say, this mental blindness, often extends to the near relatives. 4. Probably many moderate drinkers would agree with what has been said, and would give thanks that they are not as other men are. Yes, by all means let them give thanks for God’s protecting grace. But let them also ask themselves whether their example as moderate drinkers is helpful to their family and friends, whether the edifying spectacle of their self-restraint is likely to diminish the number of drunkards or to lessen the peril to which so many are exposed. (*J. E. Crawshaw.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

VER. 1. *Be not thou envious against evil men, neither desire to be with them.—Evil men not to be envied:*—The first verse of this chapter is very naturally connected with the close of the chapter preceding. There is little room for “envy” of such characters as the one there so graphically depicted, and of all men on earth

they will be the last whose company will be "desired" by the wise and good. But the counsel before us may be taken more generally. Far be it that "evil men" of any stamp should be envied—either for their boasted freedom or their apparent prosperity. Their freedom is but the semblance of the blessing. It is the reality of bondage. They promise liberty, and are themselves the slaves of corruption. And their prosperity! Oh, deem it not a mark of God's favour! It is all deceitful. It ends in ruin. "Desire not to be with them." How oft-repeated is this counsel! How often is the warning enforced by similar reasons! "For their heart studieth destruction, and their lips talk of mischief." Their designs of evil fully matured find utterance. They communicate their projects to others like-minded with themselves—projects of fraud, peculation, robbery; or if on such matters there be a sense of social honour, and an adherence to the conventional morality of the world, there may be projects of impurity—of lewdness and seduction, of drunken frolic and revel, of the snares of temptation for some simple but sober youth, whom it will be so excellent a joke to induce to join them in sin. All this, under what palliative epithets soever it may pass in the world, is "mischief" and "destruction." (R. Wardlaw, D.D.)

Vers. 3, 4. **Through wisdom is an house builded.**—*The spiritual edifice* :—The subject is wisdom, with its enlargements of understanding and knowledge—terms probably used to denote the expansions of the master principle, and the ramifications into which it extends, as it sways and develops the faculties of the mind. Distinguish between the "wisdom of this world" and the "wisdom of God." They who embrace the wisdom of God beckon the other wisdom with it. They who embrace the latter usually repel the invitation, and continue their warfare in the pride and scorn of self-satisfied security, which ultimately terminates in their destruction. **I. WISDOM IS THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH A HOUSE MUST BE BUILT.** It is the great principle on which all other principles must be founded. But what is this wisdom? Solomon says, "the fear of the Lord." True religion. Consisting, not in a mere external or intellectual acknowledgment of an overruling Deity, much less in any amount of mere intellectual knowledge, but in an actual going to Wisdom as to a personage, not merely in possessing a certain quality or disposition of mind, but in really going to God by faith, and so accepting and following the terms of His covenant that the qualities and dispositions of mind, which manifest the being built on wisdom, spring from that source, coming down from God to man as the gifts of His grace, not going up from man towards God. **II. THE STRENGTH, SUPERSTRUCTURE, AND ORNAMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL EDIFICE.** The active duties of our profession are implied in carrying out the obligations and requirements of a true and heart-born faith. Store your minds with knowledge; only see that first of all you possess the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus. (R. H. Davies, B.A.) *The wise life-builder* :—Here evil is contrasted with wisdom: evil throws down, wisdom builds up; evil brings darkness, wisdom brings light. Wisdom is represented as a builder; one who builds with a plan, not merely putting stone upon stone for the sake of building a high tower without purpose or utility, but building a house, signifying arrangement, commodiousness, security, hospitality: a very home that should have in it the elements of a school, the beginning of a sanctuary, and a hint of heaven itself. True building is not to be hurried. Sometimes the builder rests from his labours, that he may give the wall time to settle, lest by overpowering the foundation he bring the work to destruction. True life-building means that a plan and a specification has been provided, whereby the work as to its scope and purpose is clearly indicated, and the materials with which the work is to be executed are named one by one, as to their quality and their proportions. It is not to be supposed that men go forth into the open field and begin to build as on the spur of the moment. Every building will speak for itself. If the perpendicular has been broken, if the horizontal line is out of course, if doors and windows are out of proportion, even the fool can see how abortive has been the labours of the builder. Where everything expresses thoughtfulness, experience, and skill, the trained eye will approve the figure of the building, and all men will feel that no encroachment has been made upon the propriety of life. Every duly considered and well-built house comes into existence as if by right; it establishes its own claim to abide among the homes of men. So it is with a heart-house, a life-house, a house representing character and action and purpose; there is nothing violent about the building, and when it is set forth in all its proportions it needs no vindication, for its strength is a defence, and its beauty is an explanation. (J. Parker, D.D.)

Ver. 5. A wise man is strong; yea, a man of knowledge increaseth strength.—*Wisdom the strength of the mind* :—The changes of life often have unhappy effects on the temper of our minds. A defence against these evils would be very desirable. Who would not possess a constant equanimity, an uniform peace and steady resolution of soul? Solomon says this is to be gained through wisdom, or religious virtue. I. THE DISEASED AND FEEBLE STATE OF MIND AGAINST WHICH WISDOM IS THE PROPER REMEDY. It seemeth to consist in an indisposition for the due exercise of its powers. The body is then distempered and weak, and so the mind is rendered incapable of the offices which become such a being. The weakness principally appeareth in the prevalence of passions which are excited by them, and are summed up in aversion; that is, in the prevalence of fear and sorrow and anger. Reason and moral conscience is the man; in its vigour and authority over the inferior springs of action our strength lieth. 1. Fear is an infirmity natural to man, which very often hath pernicious effects, and in itself, abstracting from its effects, is very uncomfortable. Every living creature, according to its measure of perfection, hath a self-enjoyment, and findeth ease and satisfaction in its sound and healthy state. But it was wisely provided that such of them as are liable to dangers and annoyances from abroad should have a painful apprehension of them, in order to their being put upon the speediest methods for avoiding them. This is the end of fear in their constitution. Man is made with a larger comprehension, and with the privilege of foresight, by which he discovereth a variety of dangers, and seeth them at a great distance; and this certainly was not originally intended to be his torment, but, if it be so in event, it must be by way of penal infliction for his faults, or a distemper of his mind against which there is a proper remedy provided. 2. Grief. This is not equal in all men. Some spirits can sustain their infirmity better than others. But all find it requires a force above that of mere unimproved and uncultivated nature to support it. It requireth religious wisdom. 3. Anger. Felt when the disagreeable event is considered an injury, and as befalling us by the injustice or ill-will of a voluntary agent. Now consider the symptoms of this natural weakness. During the prevalence of these passions the understanding is obscured; at least, we have not the due use of it. It seems to be the natural tendency of pain to arrest the thoughts. The counsels of the mind are at such times full of perplexity, which often produce irresolution, instability, and fatal precipitation. II. WHEREIN THE STRENGTH OF THE WISE MAN LIETH. How wisdom, or religious virtue, is the cure of our weakness and its symptoms. 1. It is a defence against fear, because it represents uncomfortable events as too inconsiderable to affect our main interests. The good "man is satisfied from himself"; his integrity is his chief treasure. Virtue is a greater good than riches, worldly honours, and carnal pleasure. 2. The testimony of our conscience is an effectual preservative against immoderate dejecting fears, as it gives us confidence towards God and assurance of His favour. 3. The wise man is strong against fear, because his confidence is in the Divine all-sufficiency, love, and faithfulness. Chance and necessity, as the cause of events, are the refuge of ignorant minds. Faith controls the fears of a religious mind, for it represents an intelligent, powerful, and gracious Providence as superintending all affairs and directing all events irresistibly. 4. The wise man is strengthened by the Christian hope of immortality. The same principles and sentiments restrain immoderate anger. So religious wisdom delivers us from the symptoms of weakness arising from the passions; ignorance and confusion; the darkened understanding. True wisdom openeth the eyes. There is an admirable simplicity in religion. A man of knowledge increaseth strength against irresolution, unsteadiness, and precipitancy; his behaviour is consistent and uniform, because it is conducted by one invariable principle. The wise and virtuous perform their good works with vigour and alacrity. And this spiritual strength is ever increasing, and a constant source of pleasure to the man himself. Then let us examine ourselves, and try what equanimity we maintain in the changes of life. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *Fixed religious principles* :—"A wise man is strong." That is, a true man; one who fears God. We shall seek to show the infinite importance of fixed principles— I. IN RELATION TO THE DUTIES OF LIFE. II. IN REGARD TO THE RELATIONSHIPS OF LIFE. III. IN RELATION TO THE TRIALS OF LIFE. IV. AS A SAFEGUARD AGAINST THE TEMPTATIONS OF LIFE. (*F. Wagstaff.*)

Ver. 9. The thought of foolishness is sin.—*The nature of evil thoughts* :— I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE "THOUGHT OF FOOLISHNESS"? Folly and sin signify the

same thing in Scripture. We are not to understand thoughts of pure speculation as simple acts of the understanding; nor even a thought of sudden and transient inclination towards sin, which arises in our minds before we are aware and which we endeavour to stifle. Though such thoughts are sinful in their first rise and tendency, when the imagination has been long heated or their hearts corrupted by any criminal excess or disorder. We are to understand by a thought of foolishness one of complacency. Such a thought as the will not only consents to entertain, but which the mind delights to dwell and dilate itself upon. These evil thoughts proceed from some vicious reigning passion, or perhaps presumptuous sin. To give way to such vain and foolish thoughts is an argument of a mind very much turned and estranged from God. Such impure and loose thoughts are directly contrary to the fruits of the Spirit, and to those precepts of Holy Scripture which require us to be spiritually-minded. Many mistakenly think there is no sin in dwelling on evil thoughts, so long as they abstain from gross external acts of sin. II. RULES AND DIRECTIONS FOR THE BETTER REGULATION OF OUR THOUGHTS. 1. Take care to be always usefully or at least innocently employed. 2. Carefully examine what those things are which have been most apt to excite evil thoughts in us. And refrain from company, books, and circumstances which influence us for evil. 3. Evil thoughts frequently arise from prevailing natural temper. 4. Live under a constant sense of God's presence and inspection over us. 5. All rules and directions will avail but little toward the better government of our thoughts without the illuminating and sanctifying graces of the Spirit of God. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*) **And the scorner is an abomination to men.**—*The scorner*:—I. A DESCRIPTION OF THE SCORNER. 1. He is one who runs counter to the general reason and maxims whereby the rest of mankind govern themselves. He places his greatest glory in those disorders which the rest of mankind are most ashamed of. 2. He is one who delights to walk in the way of sinners. 3. He would be thought of as believing that there is no God. 4. He delights in ridiculing those persons or things which have a more immediate relation to God. 5. The greatest effort of the scorner is against that order of men whose peculiar office it is to minister in things pertaining to God. 6. He makes it his business to confound the distinction of virtue and vice, to call evil good and good evil. II. HIS RENDERING HIMSELF AN ABOMINATION TO MEN. This he does by—1. His common swearing. 2. His profaneness. 3. His confounding the distinction of virtue and vice. III. USEFUL IMPROVEMENTS. 1. Men generally entertain a secret esteem and veneration for religion. 2. Take care to keep ourselves at as far a distance as possible from the profane temper of mind of the scorner. Never think of God, or speak of Him, save with reverence. Be careful not to obstruct the influence of religious considerations on our hearts. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*)

Ver. 10. **If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.**—*The Christian failing in business*:—There are such failures. Christianity does not secure its disciples against misfortune and calamity. It has need of trouble. While it could not help it always without a constant miracle, it does not always help it when it can. There is a tendency in religion to promote worldly prosperity. Most of the conditions of secular success are improved by the principles and habits of spirituality. It quickens the intellect, gives calmness and self-possession to the feelings, fosters industry and diligence, creates character and credit. Many a man may be found who has been made, in this sense, by godliness. Some Christians never get on. They try many schemes, with one sorrowful result. I. CHRISTIANITY SHOULD PRESERVE FROM DESPONDENCY IN FAILURE. There is a tendency in trouble to dispirit. It may be checked by the force of natural energy of heart. The greater number of men are apt to sink under disappointment. Many cannot row against the tide. The evil of this depression is great. In relation to the worldly business. The man is as one possessed with a spirit of defeat. There is no ingenuity to plan; no vigorous employment of offered opportunities. This despondency affects other things. Begun in business, it extends to all departments of feeling and activity. Christianity tends to check this, because it limits the sphere of failure. It also changes its character. It teaches us that if we fail it may be the means of our greater success. The prostration, the sorrow, the want, may be the discipline of life everlasting. Sometimes the failure may be traced to the Christian's own fault. Then these considerations are inapplicable. But then the evil may be overruled for good. II. CHRISTIANITY SHOULD PRESERVE FROM IRRITATION IN FAILURE. If the timid are most in danger of despondency, the proud are most in danger of exasperation. And who is so free from pride as not to be in danger of this?

Failure may easily excite the evil passions of the soul, sour the temper, and arouse to anger and to wrath. If a man were only irritated against himself, there might not be much amiss. But the danger is nearly all the other way. The failing man is often found cherishing a wrong temper towards his fellows. To check this evil Christianity begets humility, and produces a spirit of benevolence. III. CHRISTIANITY SHOULD PRESERVE FROM DISHONESTY IN FAILURE. Want is a temptation to dishonesty. It is not an excuse for it. Many who never had a thought that was not honourable have fallen into sin when they fell into trouble. And even when the trouble has been much less than entire failure. There is temptation to do wrong in order to evade, or conceal, or repair misfortune. Making us to love truth and equity, Christianity connects our self-respect with these principles. And, as Christians, we should be supremely concerned for the moral honour of Christianity. (*A. J. Morris.*)

Small strength:—I. THE OCCASION REFERRED TO. "The day of adversity." 1. Reverse of fortune—poverty and want. 2. Bereavement. 3. Sickness. 4. Persecution. 5. Temptation. II. THE ACTION REPROVED. "If thou faint." Not the suffering of pain or the feeling of sorrow, but the excess of an allowable feeling. 1. When we yield to impatience, entertain hard thoughts of God, and distrust His goodness. 2. When we are so absorbed by adversity as to forget past prosperity. 3. When we yield to sorrow so far as to preclude necessary exertion. 4. When it causes us to yield to unholy methods in order to extricate ourselves from the difficulty. The Jews appealed to Egypt. III. THE FAULT EXPLAINED. "Thy strength is small." 1. Bodily. 2. Morally. 3. Spiritually. (1) Smallness of faith. (2) Weakness of hope. (3) Deficiency of love. (4) Lack of courage. (5) Want of humility. IV. THE REMEDY. 1. Call into exercise the strength you have. "To him that hath," &c. 2. Cherish higher thoughts of God. 3. Wait at the throne of grace. (*J. Bunting.*)

Susceptible character:—The wych-elm manifests the approach of winter earlier than any other tree. It becomes ruined and denuded by a touch of the frosty air, and contributes no splendour, no beauty to our autumnal scenery, as its leaves curl up, become brown, and flutter from their sprays, as early, when growing in exposed situations, as the middle of September. This character of itself marks a difference from the common elm, which preserves its verdure, except from accidental causes, long after this period, and with a fine mellow yellow hue, contributing a full share with other trees to the character and splendour of autumn. The wych-elm is an emblem of the susceptible, tender human character. The soul of such a man is highly sensitive to all external impressions. The first frosty touch of a great sorrow shakes his life to its centre. Men of a more robust type are chastened by sad events; and, mellowed by chequered experiences, live on to the tranquil maturity of their existence. But he, unfortunately, cannot face the rough blasts of adversity, and perishes at once under their cruel, chilling influence. Even the cold breath of slander sometimes bears for him a sentence of death. (*Scientific Illustrations.*) *Flourishing upon the unpromising*:—Humming-birds, colibris, and their brothers of every hue, live with impunity in the fearful forests where tropical nature, under forms oftentimes of great beauty, wages her keenest strife in those gleaming solitudes where danger lurks on every side—among the most venomous insects, and upon those most mournful plants whose every shade kills. One of them (crested, green, and blue), in the Antilles, suspends his nest to the most terrible and fatal of trees, to the spectre whose fatal glance seems to freeze your blood for ever, to the deadly manchineal. It is this parrot, which boldly crops the fruits of the fearful tree, feeds upon them, assumes their livery, and appears, from its sinister green, to draw the metallic lustre of its triumphant wings. Nature endows the birds, as she also endows men, with a marvellous capacity for accommodation to circumstances. Beautiful birds are not made out of what we should consider wholesome food, and beautiful characters are not made out of the choice events of history. Nature supplies us with an appropriative power whereby we transmute everything to the purposes which she intends to serve. We know to what splendid purposes genius has been able to turn poverty, jails, cruelty, persecution. Some of the finest characters in history have been formed by and flourished upon these unpromising elements. The bird does not take the poison and submit to death; it transmutes it into life and beauty. The hero does not let circumstances subdue him; he makes circumstances subserve the growth of his character. (*Ibid.*) *The culture that gives strength*:—If you were to hear some men's experience, you would think that they grow as the white pine grows, with straight grain, and easily split; for I notice that all that grow easy, split easy. But there are some that grow as the mahogany

grows, with veneering knots, and all quirls and contortions of grain. That is the best timber of the forest which has the most knots. Everybody seeks it, because, being hard to grow, it is hard to wear out. And when knots have been sawn and polished, how beautiful they are. There are many who are content to grow straight, like weeds on a dunghill; but there are many others who want to be stalwart and strong like the monarchs of the forest, and yet, when God sends winds of adversity to sing a lullaby in their branches, they do not like to grow in that way. They dread the culture that is really giving toughness to their soul and strength to its fibre. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Vers. 11, 12. If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death.—*The claim of our brother's need* :—1. It is supposed that there is an allusion here to what is understood to have been a custom among the Jews. When a man was being led to execution a sort of crier or herald went with the procession, publicly proclaiming that if any man hath "anything to offer even yet to show the innocence of the accused, or any circumstances of extenuation to present, or testimony to give to his character, let him now declare it; the judges are sitting; the procession to the place of execution shall be arrested; anything new in the form of evidence or testimony shall be heard, and thus execution shall be stayed." It is supposed here that a man is in danger of death. It is supposed that he is innocent. It is supposed that there is a man who can help him, even now, to prove his innocence. If that man withholds his testimony, he is guilty of murder, and comes into the judgment of God. 2. Illustrations of the principle embodied in the text. Individuals may be exposed to great suffering by no fault of their own. Many have to suffer in consequence of the operation of general laws over which they have no control. Where there is suffering, peril, or destitution on one side, there is somewhere on the other the power to help; somebody has the ability to interpose. Those that have the power may neglect it, and endeavour to find miserable apologies and excuses for their neglect. There may be perfectly honest and sufficient reasons in any case why an individual may not help or take part in affording relief, but in every case a man must be perfectly honest with himself, and not make his personal indulgence take shape as pecuniary inability to help others. (*T. Binney.*) *Help for the heathen world* :—As descriptive, the words of the text draw our attention to the heathen, and give us a very affecting representation of their state. As imperative, they turn our attention to ourselves, and point out the work which God has given us to do—to use every possible effort to rescue our perishing neighbours from the state of peril and danger in which they are placed. I. THE STATE OF THE HEATHEN WORLD. As described in the text, "drawn unto death," and "ready to be slain." 1. As respects this world. In Hindustan there are four modes whereby men and women are "drawn unto death"—women by being burnt alive on the funeral pile of their husbands, and by being buried alive in the same grave; men by being crushed beneath the wheels of the ponderous car of Juggernaut, and by being drowned in the river Ganges. 2. As respects the next world. Look at their never-dying souls; think of the everlasting importance of the world to come. They are drawn to the pains of eternal death by their numerous and enormous iniquities; by the god of this world; and by the almighty arm of a holy and righteous God. II. THE IMPERATIVE FEATURE OF THE TEXT. We must look at ourselves. 1. Our duty is clearly pointed out. We are to preach the everlasting gospel. Who will go? To whom can we look with so much propriety as to those who are already ordained to preach the gospel? But some may plead, "I am already useful and acceptable at home"; or "If I go to preach abroad, I shall inflict an injury on my own country"; or "I am not competent; I do not possess the requisite qualifications: and if I were to make the attempt I should fail"; or "We cannot see it to be our duty to embark in this work at once, and for life"; or "I am already comfortable at home, and I do not like to give up my delights." 2. We are to present fervent supplication to the throne of grace. We must pray as well as preach. 3. Another means to be employed is, liberal contributions to defray the expenses of so great an undertaking. God will not hold him guiltless who neglects this duty. (*Henry Townley.*) *Drawn unto death, and ready to be slain* :—I. A STATEMENT OF A CERTAIN CONDITION. The natural world is in this state. It is so with reference to its original and to its actual guilt. A man, as a sin agent, is evermore superadding sin to sin. II. THE MORAL CAUSES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO IT. 1. Education conducted on false estimates and erroneous principles. 2. Example. Actions affix a deeper stamp and stronger impressions than

words. 3. Habit, which is said to be a second nature. It exercises a sort of moral omnipotency over us. 4. Self-complacency of a nominal religion. 5. Pride, when it makes a man virtually deny the value of a revelation by Christ. 6. Sloth, which lulls a man into a pleasing dream, from which he would not be awakened. 7. The fear of the world, which has its branding-irons. 8. Love of sin. Its indulgence makes up the pleasure of their life. III. THE SOLEMN DUTY TO BE PERFORMED. The deliverance is not in the power of man. A sinner must see himself as he really is, in the blackness of his guilt before God. For this he must seek the animation of the Holy Spirit. He must repent; and by faith look up to the Lord Jesus. These things must be told men plainly, and pressed upon them earnestly. (T. J. Judkin, M.A.) *Vain excuses*:—It is the universal characteristic of fallen man that he endeavours to extenuate what may be wrong in his conduct, and invent excuses. Are the pleas by which you might think to justify yourselves in regard to your known duties such as would bear being submitted to God? Men will often admit an excuse without close examination; not so God. We may examine into an excuse, and nevertheless not detect its worthlessness; not so God. Men, even when satisfied that blame attaches to the individual who offers the excuse, are often forced to let him pass without punishment; not so God. Groundless excuses can be of no avail as made to God, because, in the first place, He is a being who considers everything. In the second place, He knows everything. And in the third, He rewards everything. (H. Melvill, D.D.) *To magistrates*:—This text impresses this upon us—it is the duty of every one of us to use our best strength to deliver the oppressed, but our sin is we faint and forbear to do so. 1. Reasons for this duty in respect of God. We have His command and His example. 2. In respect of ourselves. What power we have and what need we may have. Our natural powers and faculties all have their several uses and opportunities. We have power to relieve the necessities of the poor. The world is full of changes and chances, and those who now have power presently come to have need. The rule of equity is, "Do as thou wouldst be done to." 3. Reasons on consideration of the poor and oppressed. Consider the greatness of their distress, the scarcity of their friends, and the righteousness of their cause. That which you are to do for the poor is this, seek first to be well assured that their cause is just. Then you must not forsake or despise him because he is poor. 4. Reasons from the effects of the duty itself. It will gain us honour and estimation, purchase for us the blessings of the poor, and bring down on us the blessings of God. We want charity, but abound with self-love. Our defect in that appeareth by our backwardness to perform our duties to our brethren; and our excess in this, by our readiness to frame excuses for ourselves. Consider these excuses, such as—(1) We never heard of their matters. (2) We had no clear evidence that their cause was right and good. (3) We did not see how we could relieve them. God's response to such excuses is assured. Doth not He consider? Doth not He know? Will not He render? (Bp. Sanderson.)

Vers. 13, 14. So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul.—*Spiritual knowledge*:—I. It is WHOLESOME. "My son, eat thou honey, because it is good." Honey was one of the choice productions of Canaan. It was used by its inhabitants as an article of diet; it was not only delicious to the palate, but strengthening to the frame. Divine knowledge is the aliment for man's spiritual nature; without it there is no moral strength; our faculties require God Himself to feed upon. Without God it starves. He is the food of the intellect, the affections, the imagination, the conscience. II. It is DELECTABLE. "And the honeycomb, which is sweet to the taste." God's goodness in nature appears in this as well as in all other things: that the provisions essential to man's strength He has made palatable to the taste. Honey is not only strengthening, but "sweet." The pleasures of spiritual knowledge are of the most exquisite kind. III. It is SATISFYING. "When thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off." There shall be a reward. Goodness is its own reward, and the reward is equal to the highest "expectation." (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Vers. 17, 18. Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth.—*Revenge*:—Johnson makes a distinction between vengeance and revenge. Injuries, he says, are revenged; crimes are avenged. The former is an act of passion, the latter of justice. I. THE OBJECT OF REVENGE. "Thine enemy." Men are enemies to men. Humanity is not as it came from the hand of the Great Father of mankind. Sin has

made the brother a foe. If man had no enemy, he would have no revenge. In heaven no such passion burns. II. The GRATIFICATION of revenge. "Let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth." The fall, the ruin of the enemy, is bliss to the revenging soul. But if unmanly, still more un-Christian. What said Christ? "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink," &c. III. The AVENGER of revenge. "Lest the Lord see it, and it displeaseth Him, and he turn away His wrath from him." 1. Man's revenge is displeasing to God. It is opposed to the benevolence of His nature; it is contrary to the teachings of His Word. 2. Man's revenge may cause God to interpose, and relieve its victim. "He turn away His wrath from him." Coverdale renders the words thus, "Lest the Lord be angry, and turn His wrath from him to thee." Thus it was with the enemies of Samson (Judg. xvi. 25-30). (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 21. My son, fear thou the Lord and the king.—*Duty to God and the king :—*

I. A DOUBLE DUTY LAID DOWN. Or rather, a single duty, one included and comprehended in the other. Fear here is a comprehensive notion to contain in it all those duties which we owe to God principally, and to the king subordinately. 1. To fear God is to have awful apprehensions of Him in our thoughts, and to walk carefully before Him in our actions. This fear is the bottom of all true spiritual wisdom; the security against all other fears; a preservative against all sin and wilful offence; and a good preparative for the peace and welfare of society, by restraining people's minds within the due limits of their subjection, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty. 2. To fear the king we stand obliged both in conscience to God and out of interest to ourselves, seeing that he is the public guardian, upon whose well-doing the welfare of the whole community depends. 3. The sum of all religion is to be as pure in holiness, so peaceable in righteousness, when we order ourselves piously to God and obediently to the magistrate. The interests of religion and policy are so nearly twisted and woven together that they cannot be severed from one another without the utmost hazard to both. Rebellion and schism are wont to go hand in hand together. II. THE CAUTION. 1. As an expedient for the duty. The way to keep in the fear of God and the king is to forbear the company of these restless folk, to keep at a distance from them, and have nothing to do with them. 2. As a consequent of this duty. He that hath any fear of God and the king will keep himself within compass. A pious soul, a loyal heart, will admit of nothing that may shake or call in question its fidelity. As to these changers—1. Inquire who they are. Iterantes, men who go over things again and never have done. Variantes, who vary their course through all points of the compass. Detractors, that speak evil of dignities, both temporal and spiritual. Declinantes, stragglers, who go out of God's and the king's highway. 2. What is it not to meddle with them? It is to mark these men, and observe the dangerous mixture of their fine parts and foul designs. Consider well the tendency and drift of such principles as theirs. 3. The reasons why such men are not to be meddled with. There is no knowing how far they may lead you. Though you may be innocent, you may get wrapped up in others' guilt. If you escape now, you will suffer one day, in the peace of thy conscience. And thou dost endanger the eternal safety of thy soul. Since it is so, let us take heed to ourselves, and establish our spirits in the fear of the Lord and the king, and as we wish well to our own persons and to our posterity after us, let us have nothing to do with these changers. (*Adam Littleton, D.D.*) *Our duty to God and man :—*Civil government is the great comprehensive worldly blessing; for it is the foundation of peace and quiet, the spring and fountain of all those inestimable advantages which adorn and felicitate human societies. I. THE DUTIES WHICH WE OWE TO GOD AND THE KING. The fear of God is oftentimes put for the whole sum of religion. We are also to fear the king, and though there is not an equal reason, yet there is a sufficient one for this fear. The king is God's vicegerent and representative. And there must be something to work upon men's fears as well as to convince their understandings, before they will learn or practise the duty of subjection. Religion and loyalty have a close dependence on each other, and a strict connection with each other. No man can be truly religious who is not a good subject. No man can be steadily and immovably loyal who is not truly and sincerely religious. II. A PROPER MEANS PRESCRIBED FOR SECURING AND PRESERVING US IN OUR DUTY. Beware of those who are given to changes, e.g., the atheist, the restless, the rebellious. (*William Stainforth.*) *Religion in national life :—*I. THE PERFECTIONS WHICH RENDER GOD THE OBJECT OF OUR FEAR.

II. THE FEAR OF GOD AND THE KING IS THE BEST PRESERVATIVE AGAINST THE DISTURBERS OF THE PEACE AND QUIET OF ALL GOVERNMENT. It is the foundation of all those virtues from which the peace and happiness of governments must arise, and the most effectual restraint upon the vicious appetites and passions of men. Those in whom this principle rules cannot help looking upon others as the servants of one Sovereign Master, and this consideration must dispose them to have the tenderest regard for their welfare, and tie them together by the strictest bands of fraternal love and friendship. And this principle must naturally contribute to the regulating and composing those disorderly affections and passions which are the great enemies and disturbers of the peace of mankind. Religion fixes that levity and weakness of mind which is so natural to man; it unites his actions and resolutions to one great end, and makes them consistent and regular; and is the best cure of that restlessness of mind which closely adheres to our very natures, and renders us dissatisfied with what we are, or what we at present possess or enjoy; and too often disposes us wantonly to desire changes for the very sake of changing. (*John Wilcox, D.D.*) *Religious loyalty* :—The possession of power is one thing; guidance how to use it is another. The sacred writings contemplated your present as well as your future. The present, what is it but the future begun? The future, what is it but the present completed? He will most enjoy the glories of the future whose life of practical holiness best attests the work of grace within him now. The whole power of this verse consists in its unity. It is not, "My son, fear thou the Lord," and then, "My son, fear thou the king"; but, "My son, fear thou the Lord and the king." I. THE REMARKABLE COMMAND. There is much force in that word, "fear thou." Be unmoved by any motives, or influences, or examples, which may press you to do otherwise than thus. If all around you are wrong, "fear thou." Multitudes do not prove a matter to be right. Act for yourself, and do not fear to stand alone. The command here is, fear both God and the king. You must do the latter if the former be regarded. The fear of God brings with it a principle of obedience, which will influence your conduct in all things. The two things are united morally, and so a true Christian must be a good subject. II. THE DANGER OF FORGETTING THIS COMMAND. The antithesis is very striking. "Meddle not with them that are given to change." But change must not be confused with progress and improvement. Change means things that imperil primary principles of righteousness. III. THE RESULTS OF NEGLECTING THIS COMMAND. "Their calamity shall come suddenly." Apply—To serve your generation by the will of God is one of the duties and privileges of your present state. You will do it if you fear "both God and the king." (*George Venables.*) *Advice and penalty* :—I. THE ADVICE. The commendation "My son" stands first. This is such a counsel as a father would give a son. And that it is no evil one we may be sure. There is in this counsel a single act—"fear"—and a double object—"God and the king." The main drift of the advice is, a resentive against meddling with certain persons. It consists of two counter points. Do this and eschew that. Follow one, fly the other. II. THE PENALTY. It is punishment enough for a man not to follow good counsel when it is given him. Yet God hath so ordered, as there goeth ever some further evil with the contempt of good counsel. The penalty is no less than destruction and ruin; a sudden destruction, an unknown ruin. Solomon sits here as a counsellor and as a judge—a counsellor to advise, a judge to pronounce. Hear his counsel, then; if not, hear your sentence. Choose which verse you will be in. In one of them we must be. In the verse of counsel, "Fear God and the king," or in the verse of penalty, "For their destruction," &c. (*Bp. Lancelot Andrewes.*) *Fear God and king* :—The word "fear" expresses the general idea of reverence, or of holding in awe. God is to be feared according to the nature and authority of His government, kings according to the nature and authority of theirs; God supremely, kings subordinately; God as the source of all power, kings as holding theirs of God, and responsible to Him for the use they make of it. God for His character; kings simply as the representatives of power. God with a fear ever associated with the love of complacency; kings with as much love as their personal character admits of. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Loyalty of the Christian spirit* :—Dr. Büchsel, speaking of the conventicles in Germany, early in the century, in which evangelical piety, which had no voice in the Churches, found refuge, says: "I noticed that all of this way of thinking, however much they suspected regularly ordained ministers and Church authorities, yet appeared to place heartfelt confidence in the king. They were universally persuaded that his majesty personally was well inclined towards them. The king was invariably

prayed for with the utmost affection." (J. F. B. Tinling, B.A.) **And meddle not with them that are given to change.**—*Given to change*:—Harmony and order preserve societies, when all men that are in a subordinate state do readily yield to him who is the supreme according to God's law. Maximus Tyrius, the Platonist, speaks of three sorts of government—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. One end of religion is to be serviceable even to the political and civil interests of mankind; and because there can be no temporal felicity without peace, nor peace without loyal and dutiful submission, the text calls on all such as would be truly happy to "fear God and the king." I. **AN AFFIRMATIVE COMMAND.** That we express that humble and universal fear which is due to God's majesty, and that becoming reverence which is due to the king's majesty for God's sake. (This subject not now treated fully.) II. **A NEGATIVE PRECEPT.** That we have nothing to do with those who, when things are well, under pretence of mending would fain mar all, and alter everything, whether it be religion, or laws, or government, that lieth in their way. Some render the verse thus, "Meddle not with them that act their iniquities over again; them that are disobedient and disloyal afresh; them that repeat their old sins against the king and his regalities; them that are for a change, but not of their own principles and courses." Solomon's own experience led him to warn his son against intractable and ungrateful men. Other expositors do not so restrain the sense of the text, but interpret it generally of all that are given to change, though some of them for a considerable time may have kept touch with the government: "Meddle not with them that change their good principles; with them that warp their obedience; with them that are unsteady and inconsistent with themselves, and observe the pulse of the times." Men should be quiet and dutiful, and contented with their lot when things are well and in their right channel, and not abet the practices of those who cannot be at ease until the mire be stirred, and the wheel be turned upside down. Reasons for this advice of the text: 1. A retinue of the most mischievous concomitants and effects, as war, bloodshed, confusion, rapine, the subversion of laws, and ruin of families, follow upon these restless changes, these evils of innovation. 2. Change of government is rarely attempted but under some cleanly disguise and popular pretence. Popular states have been erected by the popular tricks of men. Recommend three practical things—1. The fear of the Lord. No confidence can be placed but in men who act upon the right principles of religion and honesty. 2. The fear of the king is coercive of obedience. 3. Avoid the company of restless spirits; have no fellowship with them. (Edward Pelling.) *The fewer changes the better*:—Man's power of adapting himself to new spheres and work is placed within such strict limitations, that the fewer changes he makes in life the better. There is a law of limitation for animals and men. And the facts respecting the limited range enjoyed by some animals are not more noteworthy than are those respecting the limited range of some men. There are some persons who do well enough in the dull dreary region of a cold official life, whose existence is unendurable in the midst of the associations of wit and romance. The red-tape species die if brought away from the frigid regions of officialism and formality; and there are many poor men who live honest, useful lives in the scenes of indigence who, when fortune unexpectedly transports them into the luxuriant scenes of opulence and gaiety, die from some one or other of the results of the change for which they were not constituted. Many attempts have been made to remove very good men from one position to another, and the result has been a termination of their usefulness, and often of their life. The notion that men can adapt themselves to anything is an error arising from want of observation. There is a sphere for every man; and, as a rule, the removal of him when he is fairly acclimatised either renders him useless altogether, or makes it necessary that he should be sustained by artificial inventions, and in that case he cannot lead that natural life which is necessary in the full development of his powers. It will also be found that these difficulties in adapting men to great changes of position increase with their age. (R. J. Graves, F.R.S.) *Improvement justifies change*:—To oppose all changes is to set up a plea of perfection. Every improvement (and where is there not need for improvement?) is a change. But public evils are not to be mended by railing. To be "given to change"; to alter for the sake of altering; to be weary of the old and captivated with the new, however untried; to make experiments upon modes of government, is a fearful hazard. It is losing the substance of real good in the dream of imaginary improvements; as if we must undo everything rather than be idle. (C. Bridges, M.A.)

Vers. 23-26. **These things also belong to the wise.**—*Social conduct*:—I. Here is **PARTIALITY OF JUDGMENT**; that is bad. "It is no good to have respect of persons in judgment." The principle of impartiality is enjoined both in the Old and the New Testament. In the Old, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." In the New Testament we have these words, "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons," &c. (Jas. ii. 1-9). II. Here is **FLATTERY OF THE WICKED**, which is execrable. "He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous, him shall the people curse; nations shall abhor him." If the wicked man be great in wealth, exalted in social influence and political power, there is a wondrous tendency in all the grades below to flatter him as a "righteous" man." III. Here is **REPROVING OF THE WRONG**, which is blessed. "But to them that reprove him shall be delight," &c. 1. There is a delight in such work. "To them that reprove him shall be delight." What is the delight? The delight of an approving conscience. 2. There is Divine favour in such work. "A good blessing shall come upon you." God will express His favour to such a man in many ways. 3. There is social approbation in such work. "Every man shall kiss his lips that giveth the right answer." (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 25. **To them that reprove him shall be delight, and a good blessing shall come upon them.**—*The duty of rebuking the wicked*:—I. **THE DUTY AND ITS OBLIGATION**. By "reprove" we may understand either that friendly office exercised by private persons towards their trespassing brethren, with a design and hope of reclaiming them from their evil ways, or else that severer method of proceeding by public censures and legal punishments, inflicted by persons in authority, with the same charitable end in view. Private Christians have a call and authority sufficient to admonish and reprove, where it can be done prudently and seasonably. We must not think ourselves at liberty to suffer sin and wickedness, committed in our sight and hearing, to pass without correction. The aid of the civil magistrate may be needed for those who will not be reformed and reclaimed from an evil course by arguments fetched from another world, but may be forced into better manners by temporal punishments. When these punishments have no fitness in them to make men better, they are of great use to prevent their growing worse and more hardened in their sins. The infliction of legal penalties is also necessary to prevent the contagion of bad example, that the venom spread no further, to taint the sound members, and corrupt those who are well disposed. II. **THE MOTIVES WHICH EXCITE TO THE PERFORMANCE OF THIS DUTY**. 1. Delight, or an inward joy and satisfaction, flowing from the testimony of a good conscience, which is the most agreeable of all comforts. The thought of good done lies easy in men's minds, and the reflection upon it doth ever after minister comfort and delight to them. The greatest good one man can possibly do another is to assist and further him in the way of salvation; to keep him within the lines of duty; and to reclaim him to a better course. 2. A good blessing. A just God will not let this labour of love pass without reward. He will consider it in proportion to the measure of good that is done by it, and the discouragements and difficulties with which it is usually attended. The good blessing includes the blessing of men. Every man who rebukes evil without fear or favour shall, for his integrity, wisdom, and courage, be had in universal esteem. A good magistrate is respected and honoured by those who have no great regard to religion, for reasons of state. How much more may such expect honour and veneration from those who are concerned for religion and the glory of God. (*John Waugh, D.D.*) *The delight of the rebuker of evil*:—Whence comes this delight? 1. From the consciousness of having done rightly. 2. From the possession of public approbation, affection, and confidence. 3. From a sense of Divine approbation. 4. From the affection and complacency of all good men, and the grateful acknowledgments of those whose causes have been carefully, disinterestedly, and righteously investigated and determined; even those who fail having, notwithstanding, a testimony in their consciences to the soundness of principle, and the sincerity of the desire to do right, with which all has been conducted. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 27. **Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house.**—*Preparation; its nature, obligations, and blessings*:—God loves preparations. God gives little but to preparations. All His own great

works He has done preparedly. Creation was not done without great forethought (chap. viii. 27-31). And redemption was no sudden after-thought, for before the foundation of the earth was laid redemption was cast in the mind of God. And every event that happens to every man, it was planned ages before the man was born. And the children of Israel did not enter Canaan till they had gone through a preparatory discipline. Neither did prophets, nor apostles, nor Jesus Himself, begin work without an interval of solitude and discipline for perfect readiness. The preparation of Jesus was marvellous. Ten-elevenths of that life, of which every moment was gold—ten-elevenths given to preparation. Rightly viewed, everything this side heaven, and perhaps we need not draw the limit line even there—everything is preparation. Within the compass of this present world everything is placed in the state and order that it is, to fit us for another thing which is coming afterwards. Just as in a good education every rule leads up to a higher rule, and every new piece of knowledge is the basis of another piece, so that the mind is always being made ready for something beyond it, so it is in God's dispensations. A joy may be a prelude to a sorrow, or a sorrow may be a prelude to a joy, or a joy to a higher joy, or a sorrow to a still deeper sorrow. Nothing is isolated. It is not isolated joy; it is not isolated sorrow. The great thing we have to do is to be careful that we treat everything as preparatively. We should always be asking, when joy and sorrow comes, "Of what is this the precursor? what is God going to do with me next?" You cannot always be doing duties, but you can always be preparing for them. And remember, preparations are the long things; works are the short things. Let the preparation suit what you are going to do—a general preparation for general duty—but a special preparation for things special. The materials you gather in the "field" must be suited to the particular "house" which you are going to "build." Always make a stop upon the eve, and search into your own heart, and say, "Am I ready? has God given me a true preparation?" If not, as far as you can, stop a little longer before you take another step. Whatever else you do, secure preparation before you begin. There is a frame of mind which is a continual preparedness. It is the "Here I am!" of the patriarchs. It is a high, blessed state. (*J. Vaughan, M.A.*) *Preparation for life's duties, sorrows, and joys*:—I should place first among preparations—the Sunday. A Sunday will be a preparation, if you view it as preparatory. It does not much matter whether you look upon it as the day for laying in the mind's food for the week, or as the day for raising the mind to its true tone and level for the week, or as the day to hallow anything to which you are looking, by bringing it out especially before God that day. It is a very good thing to use the Sunday for laying before God, and so solemnly consecrating, and obtaining strength and wisdom for, anything that you are planning or expecting in the course of the coming week. But if you will thus spend your Sunday as a ground, apart from the world, and in loftier ranges of thought, you are "preparing your work without, and making it fit for yourself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." What is true of the Sunday is certainly true also of all private exercises of the soul; and most of all, our morning devotions. Our morning devotions should have a distinct, preparatory character. You will find it a good rule never to open your Bible without a little secret prayer. Certainly, whatever it is worth while for a Christian to do at all, it is worth while to do measuredly and deliberately. Better to do a few things so than multitudes lightly. And the God of order and of forethought will Himself bless what most honours Him, by holy premeditation and religious accuracy, in which He sees, therefore, the most of His own image. Map your day before you go out; plan carefully; lay all beginnings in God: "Prepare thy work without, and make it fit for thyself in the field; and afterwards build thine house." But you say, "What is this preparation? I cannot so prepare." Then what does that show, but that before the beginning there is another beginning, and that the preparation itself needs to be prepared? But if you ask, "What is the right preparation for sorrow?" I answer, first, not to anticipate sorrow, for that is not filial nor childlike, but to have it well laid in your mind that sorrow must come, and to know its nature, what it is. For the danger of sorrow is, lest it come upon us overwhelmingly, and paralyse our powers. Therefore, be in a state of mind which cannot be surprised—not ignorant of what sorrow is when it comes. Is not it a needful discipline? To prepare for joys the rule is opposite. The preparation there lies in the fact of the anticipation. You cannot expect too much. For one of the perils of a joy is its throwing the mind from its equilibrium by the rush of its novelty. But he who has dealt much with

the great undertakings of God's love and promise will scarcely be surprised at any happiness that ever comes. Is he not loved? So the joy will not come disturbingly to the mind. (*Ibid.*)

Vers. 28, 29. **Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause.**—*The nature and extent of false witness*:—There is nothing more dear and valuable to men than their reputation or good name. It is a mark of an abandoned spirit to have no regard to it. Men have always been very tender in preserving it in themselves, and they ought to make great conscience of taking it wrongfully from others. So much reputation is so much power, and according to men's esteem and credit in the world, so much proportionably is their influence and the weight they have in it. For the same reasons that we are obliged not to injure our neighbour in his person or property, we ought to be very tender of his good name and reputation. Then always have a just regard to truth and charity, and the benefit and advantage of the public. Our neighbour is whomsoever it happens at any time to be in our power either to injure or do kindness to; whosoever can, in any respect, become the better or the worse, or receive any hurt or any benefit, by our behaviour towards them. The word which we render "deceive" signifies in the original, any damage or inconvenience brought upon a man in the way of slander, calumny, backbiting, or any other injurious manner of presenting him. **I. THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE SIN HERE FORBIDDEN.** The highest form of the sin is deliberately giving false evidence in judicial matters. Another degree of the vice is when men bear false testimony against their brethren, after a secret manner, in private conversation. Whether revenge, or anything else, be the temptation to the practice, the nature of the sin itself is of the deepest dye. There are still lower degrees of the fault. The careless and rash custom of spreading censorious reports to the disadvantage of our neighbour, without caring to inquire into the truth of the accusation. Under this head come innumerable sorts of calumny, detraction, slander, evil-speaking, backbiting, tale-bearing, rash judgment, &c. Men in such matters are often faulty through negligence and want of care and attention. That person is a very perfect man indeed who can be continually upon his guard against this error. The lowest degree of this fault is when men are censorious towards their brethren, spreading abroad things that are true needlessly, and contrary to the laws of charity. It is a breach of Christian charity to take delight in spreading even true reports needlessly, to the damage, or disadvantage, of our neighbour. **II. REASONS OR MOTIVES WHICH OUGHT TO INFLUENCE OUR PRACTICE IN THIS MATTER.** From the nature and constitution of human society there arises a strong argument why men ought to govern their words as well as actions. By injurious speech, mutual trust and good-will are destroyed, on which depends the welfare and happiness of mankind. Mischief comes to the man himself. The natural punishment of a licentious and unbridled tongue is the inconveniences it is very apt to bring, in the course of things, upon the person himself. But worse is the secret damage done to others. Slander and uncharitable defamation is "a pestilence that walketh in darkness." Another motive obliging men to restrain licentious speech is the consideration of the inconsistency of it with a due sense of religion. A principal part of pure religion is that men approve themselves by a good conversation, with meekness of wisdom. Another argument against calumny is the consideration that we are ourselves subject to error. He that is infallibly secured against all errors himself, let him be as censorious as he pleases upon the mistakes of others. Our Saviour forbids this censoriousness towards others, under the penalty of being more strictly judged ourselves. (*S. Clarke, D.D.*) *Wrong testimony against neighbours*:—The verses suggest three kinds of wrong testimony. **I. A CAUSELESS ONE.** "Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause." There are those who are, for no service, either to themselves or to society, testifying of the defects and infirmities of their neighbours. **II. A FALSE ONE.** "And deceive not with thy lips." **III. A REVENGEFUL ONE.** "Say not, I will do so to him as he hath done to me: I will render to the man according to his work." (*Homilist.*) *Revenging injuries*:—These words are a direct prohibition of revenging injuries and recompensing evil for evil, and give us a rule of duty in case of wrong done to us. **I. WAS REVENGE ALLOWED TO THE JEWS?** In Lev. xix. 18 it is said, "Thou shalt not avenge or bear any grudge against the children of thy people." This has been taken to imply that a Jew might kill a stranger, and consequently take any inferior degree of revenge on him. But compare the injunctions respecting the treatment of the stranger in Exod. xxii. and xxiii.;

Lev. xix. 9, 10; Deut. x., &c. As to the retaliation granted (Exod. xxi. 24), this allowance was not made to the party injured, so that he might satisfy and distribute justice to himself; but to the judge, so that he might allot compensation for the wrong done. II. ENFORCE THE GREAT DUTY OF FORGIVENESS. 1. From the reasonableness of this duty in itself. Reasonable men must allow its force and truth. By corrupt and undisciplined natures only is revenge counted as a mark of a noble and brave spirit. But it is a sign of superiority of mind to forgive the trespasser. We ought to make our forgiveness as useful to the trespasser as possibly we can. Prudence should arrest the forwardness of charity in granting pardons. 2. The great weight our Saviour lays upon our forgiving others, in order to our title to our own forgiveness. There is no proportion in number betwixt our offences against God and those of the most offensive of our brethren against us. 3. We have great reason to forgive them, because of the good use and advantage we may make of our enemies. Charity is the greatest manager in the world. III. MISTAKES WHICH MISLEAD MEN IN THEIR JUDGMENTS CONCERNING THEIR OWN FORGIVENESS. 1. The mistake of those who think they have paid a fair obedience to the law of charity, when they strike the offender only with the impartial hand of that of the law. 2. The mistake of those who think they may consign the trespasser to the judgment of God. 3. The mistake of judging the truth of our forgiveness on a principle of sloth. Some men are too ready to move themselves to resentment. 4. The mistake of thinking we have forgiven, when the fact is that the impressions have only worn off our minds. This is forgetting, not forgiving, since forgiveness is properly our own work, and not one of time. (*George Wallis, D.D.*) *Retaliation repudiated*:—An incident well worth relating is told of General Robert Lee, the Confederate officer during the American Civil War. Jefferson Davis once asked him what he thought of a certain officer in the army, as he had an important place he wanted filled by a trustworthy man. Lee gave the officer an excellent recommendation, and he was immediately promoted to the position. Some of Lee's friends told him that the officer had said some very bitter things against him, and were surprised at the General's recommendation. "I was not asked," said Lee, "for the officer's opinion of me, but my opinion of him." Only a noble heart could prompt such action. In praying, we are told to love our enemies, but in our every-day life we too often love only those who love us.

Vers. 30-34. **I went by the field of the slothful.**—*The moral sluggard*:—Take these words as a pointed reproof of the negligent and immoral head of a family. The cause of prevailing irreligion is the deplorable negligence of masters and heads of families, in cultivating that field which is more immediately placed under their inspection and care. 1. The fatal consequences of irreligious sloth and negligence in those whom Providence hath raised up to be the heads of families. Families are the nurseries of the Church and state: it is from them that every department of life is filled up. Who is the slothful man? It is the moral sluggard whom the inspired writer has in view—the man who shows his children and servants, by all his pursuits, that this world is all for which they need to care. He neglects the important seasons and opportunities for moral culture. He does not teach them the duties which they owe to one another and to society. He may permit them to be instructed by others, but he does not support the instruction by his own influence and example. See the consequences of this negligence illustrated in the sluggard's garden. Being destitute of rule, management, or control, his children absorb every wrong sentiment with their earliest sense, and are more and more corrupted with every breath they draw. There is no order, calmness, moderation, or self-command among the members of his family. 2. The futility of such apologies as are usually made for this negligence. They have not time; they have not capacity; or they do not feel under obligation in this direction. (*James Somerville.*) *The sluggard's farm*:—On one occasion Solomon looked over the broken wall of a little estate which belonged to a farmer of his country. It consisted of a piece of ploughed land and a vineyard. One glance showed him that it was owned by a sluggard, who neglected it; for the weeds had grown right plentifully, and covered all the face of the ground. From this Solomon gathered instruction. Men generally learn wisdom if they have wisdom. Some look only at the surface, while others see not only the outside shell but the living kernel of truth which is hidden in all outward things. We may find instruction everywhere. We may gather rare lessons from things that we do not like. I. THE DESCRIPTION OF A SLOTHFUL MAN. Solomon was right when he called him "a man void of understanding." Not

only does he not understand anything, but he has no understanding to understand with. He is empty-headed if he is a sluggard. As a rule we may measure a man's understanding by his useful activities. Certain persons call themselves "cultured," and yet they cultivate nothing. If knowledge, culture, education do not lead to practical service of God, we cannot have learned what Solomon calls wisdom. True wisdom is practical; boastful culture vapours and theorises. Wisdom ploughs its field, hoes its vineyard, looks to its crops, tries to make the best of everything; and he who does not do so, whatever may be his knowledge of this, of that, of the other, is "a man void of understanding." 1. Because he has opportunities which he does not use. 2. Because being bound to the performance of certain duties he did not fulfil them. 3. Because he has capacities which he does not employ. 4. Because he trifles with matters which demand his most earnest heed. The Christian who is slothful in his Master's service has no idea what he is losing. II. LOOK AT THE SLUGGARD'S LAND. 1. Land will produce something; some kind of fruit, good or bad. If you are idle in God's work you are active in the devil's work. 2. If the soul be not farmed for God, it will yield its natural produce. What is the natural produce of land when left to itself? 3. If we are slothful, the natural produce of our heart and of our sphere will be most inconvenient and unpleasant to ourselves. 4. In many instances there will be a great deal of this evil produce. III. THERE MUST BE SOME LESSON IN ALL THIS. 1. Unaided nature will always produce thorns and nettles, and nothing else. 2. See the little value of natural good intentions. This man, who left his field and his vineyard to be overgrown, always meant to work hard one of these fine days. Probably the worst people in the world are those who have the best intentions but never carry them out. Take heed of little delays and short puttings-off. You have wasted time enough already; come to the point at once before the clock strikes again. (C. H. Spurgeon.) *The broken fence*:—The slothful man did no hurt to his fellow-men. He was not grossly vicious; he had not energy enough to care for that. He always let well alone, and for the matter of that, he let ill alone. Yet he always meant to be right. I. LOOK AT THIS BROKEN FENCE. In the beginning it was a good fence, a stone wall. Mention some of the stone walls that men permit to be broken down when they backslide. 1. Sound principles instilled in youth. 2. Solid doctrines which have been learned. 3. Good habits once formed. 4. Week-night services are a stone wall. 5. So is Bible-reading. 6. So is a public profession of faith. 7. So is firmness of character. II. THE CONSEQUENCES OF A BROKEN-DOWN FENCE. 1. The boundary has gone. He does not know which is his Lord's property, and which remains an open common. 2. The protection is gone. When a man's heart has its wall broken all his thoughts will go astray, and wander upon the mountains of vanity. Nor is this all, for as good things go out, so bad things come in. 3. The land itself will go away. In many parts of Palestine the land is all ups and downs on the sides of the hills, and every bit of ground is terraced, and kept up by walls. When the walls fall the soil slips over terrace upon terrace, and the vines and trees go down with it; then the rain comes and washes the soil away, and nothing is left but barren crag which would starve a lark. Then I charge you, be sternly true to yourselves and God. Stand to your principles in this evil and wicked day. (*Ibid.*) *The sluggard's field*:—The royal philosopher has his attention drawn to a field and a vineyard in ruins. 1. Each man has a field and a vineyard entrusted to his care—the immortal soul. 2. He is provided with various implements of husbandry, with good seed, sure directions, and animating promises. 3. See the soul, the vineyard of such a labourer. The effects will generally be commensurate with the means used. As we sow we reap. 4. Observe the deplorable condition of the soul described in the text. Here is a desolate and neglected soul which once was cultivated—the backslider. Whence the cause of this sad change? What is the miserable end to be dreaded? (F. Close, M.A.) *The field of the sluggard*:—The passage is an exquisite picture. The moral of it might have been set boldly in unimaginative prose. Many persons have eyes to see things, but they do not think about what they see. If a really good man sets his heart within him to search through those things that his eyes show him, he is bound to see God. The man who saw this neglected vineyard with his inner eyes saw all that physical ruin and loss and mischief sprang from moral causes. Suffering in our physical and eternal life generally does spring from something wrong in our moral character. This vineyard had gone to ruin because its master was not man enough; he was a sluggard, an indolent fellow. It is a bad thing for a man to be too much his own master. That ruined

vineyard had the roots of its ruin in that man's character. He began to be too fond of ease, indulgence, and bodily comfort; he began to lose the pluck and spirit and enterprise that make a man take his pleasure out of his work. If you have not eyes to see what lies in your drudgery and toil, you will not come to much in this world. The progress of becoming a sluggard was a gradual one, and the progress of damage was slow but sure. The man might have taken warning, but there was a process of dilapidation going on in his character. That was the mischief. You cannot scamp your outside work without ruining your character. And it was little bit by little bit. Learn it is a very difficult thing rightly and wisely to see your neighbour's faults; but it is a much more difficult thing, though a much more necessary thing, to see your own. (*W. E. Elmslie, D.D.*)

Character:—These words illustrate that field which every man has to cultivate—the field of character. We do not start life with characters ready made. What we have at the outset are but germs and possibilities. Until we have developed these germs for ourselves, their full value is not obtained. God has given life, powers, opportunities; out of these character is formed. This is a man's own property, whether it is good or bad. Character is the true gauge of a man's worth. Character is the only property we can take with us when we leave this world. Some men's fields are partly neglected. 1. There is no fence. 2. There is no fruit. How comes this waste of precious ground? Traced to one source—self-indulgence. This reveals itself in various ways. In procrastination. In an easy assent to the popular misrepresentations of Christianity. In taking up doubts at second-hand, and parading them as though proof of their superior wisdom. But self-indulgence in every form will bring ruin. And the ruin of self-indulgence is fast approaching. "Thy poverty shall come as one that travelleth." There may be seeming delay about its arrival; but there is also certainty. It is even now upon the road. (*J. Jackson Goadby.*) *The sluggard's garden*:—The owner of this miserable garden was a sluggard. He would not work. So the deterioration went on unchecked, until what was once a beautiful, productive, cleanly-kept garden became a place of the rankest weeds. Here, in this text, is an important principle. People are always complaining that they possess few opportunities for their improvement. Wise men can go to school anywhere. We may learn by other men's mistakes. There are many sluggards. 1. The home sluggard. Usually a woman. Neglected homes lie at the root of much of the misery, sin, and unhappiness of the world to-day. 2. The sluggard in the battle of life. A good-for-nothing—a waster of time, money, and precious opportunities. God has not given us life to idle away. Maybe that something of this sluggish disposition lies within us all, and must be continually struggled with. The men who have done most in life, achieved the greatest fame, and gained its best prizes, have all been steady workers, diligent plodders. 3. The sluggard in the field of conscience. Weeds always grow quickly, though imperceptibly. There is a law of degeneration. It may be stated in this way: "Let a thing alone, and it is certain to deteriorate." It is thus in the realm of conscience. There is nothing more dangerous than procrastination in the affairs of the soul and conscience. Many a man is aware of evil habits, and intends to give them up by and by. They never are given up in that way. Let your life alone, and you will awaken some day in awful astonishment at the depths to which you have sunk. Give up indolence and procrastination, then. (*Wm. Hay, B.D.*) *Idleness*:—I. It is FOOLISH. Solomon characterises this indolent man as one "void of understanding." Wherein do you see this man's folly? In the flagrant neglect of his own interests. You may cultivate your field by proxy, but you can only cultivate your soul yourself. II. It is PROCRASTINATING. III. It is RUINOUS. 1. Consider the wretched condition to which his estate was reduced. "Lo, it was all grown over with thorns," &c. It might have waved in golden grain. Two things suggested by the words. 1. That the ruin is gradual in its approach. It does not burst on you at once, like a thunder-storm. 2. The ruin is terrible in its consummation. "As an armed man." It will seize you as with the grasp of an indignant warrior. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *The sluggard's vineyard*:—I. SURVEY THIS WASTE VINEYARD. 1. We can see nothing but weeds. The outgrowths of the depraved heart yield no real revenue to man. Covetousness, malice, vain thoughts, evil desires, unbelief. 2. How luxuriantly they grow! Our evil propensities must, if unchecked by grace, increase. 3. There are various kinds of growth. "Thorns and nettles." There may be a man of one book, business, virtue—but not of one evil propensity. 4. They are all harmful. "Thorns" to

lacerate; "nettles" to sting. 5. The wall is broken. Anybody might sow there, or water the unprofitable crop—except the good sower, and he must enter by the door. God saves us from our sluggishness, not in it. II. WHY IT REMAINS IN THIS DEPLORABLE CONDITION. Ignorance that will not learn, and slothfulness that will not work. III. EXPOSTULATE WITH THE SLUGGARD. 1. The vineyard is not your own. 2. Think what this vineyard might produce. Grapes for the cup of the King—fruit for days of sickness—refreshment for old age. 3. In its present state it is harmful to your neighbours. The thistle-down will float far and wide. IV. IN CONCLUSION, SOME WORDS OF EARNEST COUNSEL. 1. Come forth from your couch of indifference and resolutely inspect this desolate scene. 2. Do not seek to satisfy conscience by pulling a weed here and there. It must be thoroughly delved; ploughed up. "Ye must be born again." 3. Do not be content with showing a few wild grapes. (*R. A. Griffin.*) *The vineyard of the sluggard* :—Some preachers teach morality without showing its vital connection with the gospel. Some fall into the opposite error, and fail to exhibit the ethical side of the gospel. I. THE FIELD OF THE SLUGGARD TEACHES THAT IT IS WRONG TO ABUSE WHAT WE REGARD AS OUR OWN. The sluggard might contend that the garden was his own. The assumption is unfounded, and even blasphemous. 1. It is a sign of gross disloyalty to God, who prefers an absolute claim to our life and service. 2. It involves a serious loss to our fellow-creatures, because the wind carries the seeds of our neglect into our neighbour's garden. Apply to moral influence. II. THE POSSESSION OF ADVANTAGES, SO FAR FROM ABSOLVING US FROM THE NECESSITY OF LABOUR AND SELF-CULTURE, RENDERS THEM MORE NECESSARY. The area of our responsibility coincides with the area of our possessions. 1. The cultivation of the body is a sacred obligation. 2. The mind is a vineyard that ought to be cultivated. 3. There is, too, the vineyard of the heart. III. NEGLECT, AS WELL AS WILFUL WICKEDNESS, MOVE IN THE DIRECTION OF DESTRUCTION. Observe that not only was the soil covered with noxious growths, but the means of protection were destroyed. IV. GOOD MEN WILL LEARN FROM THE FOLLIES AND MISERIES OF WICKED MEN. Such instruction is gathered by observation and reflection. The two principal methods of acquiring wisdom. Observation collects facts, reflection arranges and applies them, converting them into solid nutriment for mind and heart. (*Preacher's Magazine.*) *The slothful pastor* :—1. To every minister of God there is entrusted a field and a vineyard. 2. God supplies his labourer with various implements of husbandry, with good seed and providential opportunities. 3. God makes special promises to every devoted husbandman. 4. What a blessed sight is the field and vineyard of such a labourer! 5. But consider the different picture drawn in the text. What is so affecting as the contemplation of a neglected parish? How is this to be accounted for? "This is the field of the slothful, and the vineyard of the man void of understanding." What is the people's duty, in the consideration of such a subject as this? 1. Let us all be anxious to avail ourselves of the religious privileges which we possess. 2. If it is our misfortune to have a slothful husbandman, let us not desert the Church, but unite in prayer for him and wait on God in meek submission to His will. (*F. Close, M.A.*) *The fool's vineyard* :—In every age the sluggard and the fool have had their place, as well as the labourer and the wise man. I. THE SCENE SHOWS US THAT IF WE WILL NOT HAVE FLOWERS AND FRUITS WE SHALL CERTAINLY HAVE THORNS AND NETTLES. We cannot set aside the laws of nature. There is a law of growth in the very ground. It is the same with the character of man. We cannot simply do nothing. Life has its laws. We may pay them no heed, but they will assert themselves notwithstanding. 1. A man may resolve not to cultivate his mind. What then? The weeds of false notions, the thorns and nettles of prejudice, will prove his intellectual indolence. 2. A man may neglect to cultivate his moral nature. He will have nothing to do with religion. What then? Look at his false ideas, his superstition, his narrowness, his want of veneration, his superficial judgments, the weeds that have grown up. II. THE SLUGGARD AND THE FOOL CANNOT HIDE THE RESULTS OF THEIR NEGLECT. 1. We cannot confine the results of a wasted life within our own bounds. 2. This being the case, we have not a right to do with what we call our own as we please. There is nothing which we can strictly call our own. Society will not allow us to do what we please with our own. III. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE RIGHT IN SOME PARTICULARS AND TO BE GRIEVOUSLY WRONG IN OTHERS. The legal right of the slothful man to the possession of the field might be undisputed. The vineyard might have fallen into the hands of the fool by strict lawful descent. So far so good. The case is on this side perfectly sound.

Yet possession was not followed by cultivation. It is not enough to possess; we must increase. You ought not to allow even a house to fall into decay. There is no right of abuse. You have not a right to be dirty, to be ignorant, to be careless of life; on that line no rights have ever been established. IV. THE SCENE SHOWS THAT EVEN THE WORST ABUSES MAY BE TURNED TO GOOD ACCOUNT. The good man is an example; the bad man is a warning. 1. You will see that the finest possessions may be wasted; property, talent, influence, opportunity. 2. You will see that wickedness always moves in the direction of destruction. It must do so. All indolence must go down. All sin forces itself in the direction of perdition. How did the wise man know that the man was void of understanding? By the state of his vineyard. Know a man by his surroundings, know him by his habits; there is character in everything. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *Mental cultivation essential to the soul's salvation*:—The immortal soul, although one and indivisible as its Author, yet, like a large estate, is divided into various sections, as the understanding, the memory, and the affections. 1. The intellectual faculty is the understanding. If not cultivated, it will produce an attendant crop of evil thoughts and vain imaginations, which, like thorns and nettles, will injuriously affect the soul. 2. Another property of the soul to be cultivated is the memory, and unless that is attended to, all the other would be like casting seed by the wayside. 3. Another section of the soul is that of the affections which are ever disposed to run wild, and want continual pruning and training, to guide them in a right direction. The heart is liable to alight upon objects that may pierce it with many sorrows, to prevent which the most efficient remedy is to have the mind occupied as much as possible in contemplation of eternal blessings. If the mind were to dwell on the attributes of the Deity, especially as the God of love, it would expand with delight as the blossom to the sun. (*William Neville, M.A.*) *Practical views of human life*:—How much have we profited, in the character of servants of God, by what we have seen of men? How much more wise in the best sense, conscientious, apt, effectually warned? The world should be regarded as an extensive outer department of the great school of religion. The things which the servant of God is taught in the inner school he is to observe illustrated, exemplified, proved, and enforced in this wide, outer department. When the learner in God's peculiar school goes out to observe mankind he will think of the manner and cautions and rules for turning what he sees to the most beneficial account, and the most instructive points to fix his attention upon. An obvious one is, let not his observing be merely of the nature of speculation, not simply a seeing and judging what men are. Our knowledge of men must be diligently applied to a salutary use, especially for ourselves. Another point of admonition is—against prejudice and arrogance in observing and judging. Men often have some prepossession, and everything is forced into conformity to that. Or they have a set of judgments, estimates, shaped ready in their minds, and upon the slightest circumstance they will instantly fix one of them on a fellow-mortal. Some men assume to have an infallible insight, and perfect comprehension on all occasions; and pronounce as if there could be no appeal. Another warning is, beware of taking pleasure in perceiving and ascertaining what is wrong in man. Another rule is, take care that observations on other men are not suffered to go to the effect of our being better pleased with ourselves. There is a strange tendency to a gratified pride in our own supposed virtues; and to a most indulgent judgment of the things which even the grossest self-love cannot wholly approve. Our whole system and practice in the observation of the world should be resolutely formed on this principle, that our own correction is the grand object to be faithfully and constantly kept in view. Some more special observations may be given. Think of the probable difference between our judgments of the persons we look upon and their own judgments of themselves. In observing mankind we perceive, to a great extent, a sad deficiency or depravation of conscience; what a trifle they can make of many most important discriminations between good and evil. From this sight should not a solemn admonition come to us? One of the most conspicuous things to be noticed in looking on mankind is—how temptation operates and prevails. From this there should be an instructed vigilance for ourselves and appropriate prayers. A mournful thing to notice will be the great errors, the lapses, of good men. Reflect how unsafe any man, every man, is, but as God preserves him. Observe, too, the effect of situation and circumstance. How much they form men's notions, consciences, and habits as to good and evil. Observe errors of judgment—opinions; how they arise, become fixed, or

are perverted. Take note of all worthier things, exemplary virtues, graces, wisdom. It is delightful to turn for instruction to these. (*John Foster.*) *The sluggard's garden.*—The scene is familiar in Syria, where the intense heat and frequent rains so stimulate all wild and natural growths that a few months of neglect suffice to convert even the most carefully tilled plot and the most carefully tended vineyard into a scene of desolation. Under the pressure of an Eastern climate noxious weeds and brambles suck the soil's fertility from wholesome plants and flowers with an astonishing and alarming rapidity. Not that similar catastrophes are unknown even in England; but, with us, it takes longer to produce them. Most of us must have seen plots where once a fair garden grew, which, in the course of a few years' neglect, were all overrun with coltsfoot, dock, nettles, groundsel, and other foul weeds. It is not simply, as a careful observer has pointed out, that land once under the plough or the spade loses, when it is left untended, the special and wholesome growth with which it has been planted. The deterioration goes farther than that. For "the flora which follows the plough," or the spade, "is much more varied and delicate and beautiful" than that of the unbroken land. And when tilled land is suffered to fall back into the hands of Nature, all these more delicate and beautiful wild flowers are supplanted by gorse and bramble, nettle and dock, and, above all, by the close, wiry grass which usurps and covers so many of our commons. Even where the plants in a neglected garden are not altogether supplanted and dispossessed, an ominous process of degeneration sets in. The flowers, once tended with so much care and grown to such perfection, revert to an earlier and inferior type; they lose form, colour, perfume; the large "voluptuous garden roses," with their infinite variety and infinite wealth of hue, sink back into the primitive dog-rose of our hedges, and the whole race of choice, cultivated geraniums into the cranesbill of the copse and the wayside. This, then, is the parable. Neglect a garden, and it soon loses all its value, all its distinction. It is either overrun with wilder and less worthy growths, or the plants which once either gave it beauty or ministered to the wants of man degenerate into a baser type, and no longer yield fruit that he cares to eat or flowers that he cares to pluck. And the moral is as simple and direct as it well can be (vers. 33, 34). It is a warning to the man void of understanding and energy, that an utter destitution, a shameful misery, is the proper and inevitable result of his folly and sloth. We need not go far to find facts which prove the truth of this warning, and the need for it. If we go into the nearest workhouse ward, it is not too much to say that half the miserable paupers we meet there ought not to be there; they have sunk into pauperism not by sheer misfortune, not by the pressure of accidents they were unable to resist, but by a creeping indolence, by self-neglect, by vice, by the failure of speculations to which they were driven by their impatience of honest labour with its slow rewards, by a love of pleasure or self-indulgence which held them back from that whole-hearted industry and devotion to daily toil by which alone men can thrive. If we go to any dock or labour yard in which men earn a miserable pittance by unskilled and precarious labour, again we are well within the mark if we reckon that half the men we find there ought never to have been there, and would not have been there had they diligently availed themselves of the opportunities of the several positions from which they have fallen. If we go into any family, shall we not find in it a lad who has no decided leaning to any vocation, who "doesn't much care what he does," and who in his heart of hearts would rather do nothing at all, whether for himself or for the world, if only he could live by it? If we go into any school or college, shall we not be still more fortunate if, for one boy or man bent on study, bent on learning and acquiring as much as he may, and so cultivating all the good growths and habits of the soul, we find no more than one who is content to scramble through his work anyhow, who will not learn a jot more than he can help, who throws away opportunity after opportunity, and is throwing away, with his opportunities, his chances of service and distinction? No thoughtful observer of human life will for a moment admit that laziness is a defunct sin, or that the sluggard is rapidly becoming extinct. He is everywhere; and, wherever he is, the process of degeneration has set in and needs to be checked. And how shall it be checked, how shall the man "void of understanding" be recovered to a useful and diligent life, if not by the warning that, by the very course and constitution of his nature, indolence breeds its own punishment? The moral, then, is by no means tame or impertinent to the present conditions of men. But we need not confine ourselves to the Hebrew poet's point of view. As we stand by his side, and look with him over the

wall of the once fair garden, now all overgrown with nettles that sting and thorns that tear, we may raise the law of which he speaks to its highest plane, and view it in its more directly spiritual aspect. "Emphatic as is the direct teaching" of this proverb, says Dr. Plumptre, "it may be taken as a parable of something yet deeper. The field and the vineyard are more than the man's earthly possessions. His neglect brings barrenness or desolation in the garden of the soul." Nor is it in the least difficult to trace the working of this law in "the garden of the soul." It is not enough that we once believed and obeyed. It is not enough that we once waged open war against evil, and ardently pursued that which is good. If we have settled down into a quiet and easy enjoyment of our very religion; if we are not watchful and diligent, "resolute and untiring"; if we cannot work in all weathers; if we shrink from every call to do something for God and man, or begin to calculate how little we can do, instead of how much; if we make no sacrifice for the sake of truth and righteousness, or mourn and complain over every sacrifice we are compelled to make; if we cease to strive vigorously, with clear and firm determination, against the evil forces and inclinations by which we are constantly beset; if we no longer care to learn any new truth that may break forth from God's holy Word or from the patient researches of men; if, instead of recognising and rejoicing in any new aspect of duty, any new form of service, we are growing lax and indifferent even in the discharge of duties we once loved—sluggardliness is beginning to eat into our heart, our faith, our life; the good growths of the soul are beginning to deteriorate and decay, and its evil growths to wax bold and masterful. If nothing less will rouse and arrest us, let us remember that, by the very course and constitution of nature, by a law which admits of no exception, mere indolence, mere neglect, merely being quiet and at ease, mere failure to grow and make increase to ourselves in good thoughts, good feeling, good deeds, is to sink toward the evils we most dread, from which we have been redeemed, and which ought not therefore any longer to have power over us. It is to revert to our original and inferior type; and to revert to that will only too surely be the first step toward sinking to a type still lower and more hopeless. A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little more folding of the hands to rest when they ought to be lifted up for the labour which is prayer, and our poverty may come on us apace, and our want—the lack and destitution natural and inevitable to our sinking and neglected condition—may spring upon us like an armed man. (S. Cox, D.D.)

CHAPTER XXV.

VER. 2. It is the glory of God to conceal a thing.—*The glory of God in concealing*:—If God were to conceal everything from our view, it would be impossible that any glory could result to Him from the sentiments and actions of His creatures. It is by a partial communication of Himself that He has, in the highest degree, consulted His honour and manifested His wisdom. A temperature of mingled light and obscurity, a combination of discovery and concealment, is calculated to produce the most suitable impressions of the Divine excellence on the minds of fallen creatures. 1. THE DIVINE BEING IS ACCUSTOMED TO CONCEAL MUCH. Specify some instances. 1. In relation to His own nature, and the manner of His existence. His essence is altogether hidden from the most profound investigation, the most laborious research, the most subtle penetration, of His creatures. We ascribe to Him attributes and virtues; but how He exists, in an essential and eternal nature of His own, no man can know. His perfections are impressed on the works of nature, but in such a manner that we learn them only by inference. 2. In relation to the structure and constitution of His works. The scenes of nature lie open to our view. But the mysteries of nature, with regard to the essences of things, and indeed to a multitude of subtle operations, are kept in a kind of sacred reserve, and elude the utmost efforts of philosophy to surprise them in their concealments, and bring them to light. Those that have devoted themselves to an investigation of the laws of nature perceive that the meanest work of God is inexhaustible; contains secrets which the wisdom of man will never be able to penetrate. 3. In the dispensations of His providence. By which is meant that series of actions which the Divine Being is continually carrying on in the government of the world

which He has made. There exists such a decided connection between well-doing and happiness on the one hand, and between wickedness and misery on the other, as sufficiently to show, even independently of revelation, that the Divine Being is the patron of rectitude and the enemy of vice. But the natural course of things is frequently interrupted and suspended by incidental causes; so that particular exceptions are continually occurring to the ordinary rule. God conceals the design for which many events are permitted to take place. And He is accustomed to throw much obscurity over the future. The most important events of human life, on which our happiness greatly depends, are, for the most part, concealed from our view. 4. In the economy of grace and redemption. The revelation contained in the Scriptures extends only to facts, not to the theory of those facts, or their original causes. The most important truths are communicated in a dogmatic, not a theoretic, manner. II. THE DIVINE BEING PROMOTES HIS GLORY, BY SUCH A TEMPERATURE OF LIGHT AND SHADE AS THAT WHICH DISTINGUISHES ALL HIS DISCOVERIES OF HIMSELF, AND HIS DISPENSATIONS TOWARDS HIS CREATURES. 1. The concealment of things tends to glorify Him, as it is, in part, the necessary consequence of His infinite superiority to all finite beings in wisdom and understanding. His purposes and designs cannot be adequately scanned by the wisdom of men. 2. It evinces His entire independence of the wisdom, counsel, or co-operation of any or all of His creatures. He may, with infinite safety and propriety, retire within Himself, into the secret recesses of His own essence. 3. Such a degree of obscurity as attends the partial manifestation of the Divine will, the progressive development of the Divine purposes, is eminently adapted to the state, exigency, and condition of men. The prophetic parts of Scripture are proverbially obscure. By not explaining His doings, God trains us to submission, and cultures humility and vigilance, while at the same time exciting to diligence and exertion. While there are many things which God conceals, and thereby advances His glory, He has made manifest all that it is essential for man to know. And among the things fully revealed is the placability of God, His readiness to receive the chief of sinners who repent of their sins and believe the gospel. (*Robert Hall, M.A.*) *God glorified by mystery*:—In our dealing with our fellow-men we resent reserve, secrecy, isolation, almost as sharply as though they were moral transgressions. We are attracted by frankness. The best hated men the world has had in it have always been men of silence. Mystery is one of the arts of crafty ambition, for the silly world is generally ready to accept silence for wisdom. Men cultivate the habit of concealment, so that they may pass themselves off for better than they really are. But reserve is not always ignoble. Strong, and noble, and unselfish qualities sometimes determine a man's silence. The welfare of an empire may sometimes turn upon the power a statesman has of keeping the counsel of a department. There are reservations in the knowledge that God has given us of His own nature, purpose, and government; but these reservations always rest upon motives that are pure, noble, and holy, and are identified with the highest glory of the Divine character. No mystery is meant to alienate us from God, but to attach us in closer bonds. It is needless to define the area of mystery, if indeed that were possible. It starts in God, and covers the last outlying atom of His dominion. 1. There are mysteries in the Divine nature and government that bear direct witness to the glory of God's person. The silence He maintains is a sign of His self-sufficiency. As a matter of privilege, God may permit us to enter into sympathy and co-operation with Himself and His work. But He does not need our help, and by the stern reserve in His revelations He asserts the separateness and the sufficiency of His own mighty power. If He employ us at all, it is for our good. His power is separate, sufficient, solitary. God conceals many things, to remind us of the gulf that separates the glory of His nature from the dimness of all finite natures. Man is destined to more exalted and intimate communion with his Maker than any other being in the universe, and yet there are limitations upon his privilege necessitated by the very supremacy of God. There are secrets we cannot enter, counsels we cannot share, age-long problems, the solution of which we are not permitted to see. God conceals many things, so that throughout the successive stages of our destiny He may bring into our contemplation of His nature and works elements of inexhaustible freshness. Reservations that are determined by motives of this type have an intimate relation to the glory of the Divine name. The revelations of the life to come will be gradual and progressive. If God's revelation were a revelation of exhaustive fullness, a revelation with no reserved questions in it, the very enchantment of God's nature would be gone. 2. God is glorified by mystery, because mystery has its

place in the discipline and exaltation of human character. The veiled truth sometimes calls out a higher faith, a more chastened resignation, a more childlike obedience in God's people, than the truth that is unveiled. God conceals many things, so that He may be magnified through His people's trust in darkness and uncertainty. No genuine spirit of trust can spring up in ignorance. In God's dealings with us, profound silence and ringing oracle, the hidden and the revealed, the mystery and the defined truth, always alternate with each other. It is "the glory of God to conceal a thing," because by the very shadows in which He hides it we are cast with a more pathetic dependence upon His sympathy and care, and come into truer and more childlike contact with His spirit. God conceals many things, so that He may protect us from needless pain and fear, and magnify His own gentleness. Many a thing must be hidden from a child, and the more sensitive he is, the stricter must be the concealment. God conceals some things from us to excite us to nobler and more strenuous endeavour in our search after the truth. There are truths that we shall come to know through our own thought and struggle, and deepening spirituality of life, temporary mysteries that it is best for us to know through conflict, experience, sustained contemplation. God hides many things from the world, so that He may have secrets with the custody of which He can honour His own chosen servants. And He conceals some things from us, so that He may impress us with the solemnities of the unknown. God never conceals what may be necessary to furnish His people for the work and service of life. Let the revelation inspire your faith, and let the mystery awaken your awe. (*Thomas G. Selby.*) *The glory of God and the honour of kings*.—I. THE MEANING OF THE PASSAGE IS SUPPOSED TO BE THAT GOD CONCEALS MUCH, AND THAT IT IS HIS GLORY TO DO SO. There is a truth in this. We often try to find out God. God is the profoundest mystery in the universe, and yet all is mystery without Him. No creature knows God. There is much concealed in nature. It is not wonderful that there should be much in God's providential procedure that is concealed from us. God's ways are not our ways. If He has not given us light, it is better for us to be in darkness. II. THE GREAT PRINCIPLE CONTAINED IN THE TEXT. The text is a whole. One part must be taken with reference to the other. The wise man says it is the glory of God to do that which is not the glory of kings to do. Government is necessary to the very existence of society. There can be no government without law. It is the glory of all governments to frame wise and salutary laws for the well-being and true happiness of society, to guard these by sanctions, and by all the majesty of power. Governments do not originate that which is moral in law. They do not create the distinctions between right and wrong, good and evil. Magistrates are the representatives of law. They are to see that it is respected and maintained, and they are to punish law-breakers; if not, it is because offenders baffle pursuit, and hide themselves. If kings do not search out a matter, it is because they are indifferent to the conduct of their subjects, and care not whether they are virtuous or vicious; and then the hour of revolution is at hand; the kingdom will fall. The glory of God is the very opposite to the honour of kings. God is a law-giver. His will is the law of all morals. His being is the foundation of all law. And yet He has made provision for pardoning men. He hides, He conceals their sins. He does this by an atonement. It is the glory of God to save men by the death of Christ, because by saving them thus He may magnify His own law, and honour His own government. Governments have no gospel for criminals. God forgives sins. (*H. J. Bevis.*) *Man's knowledge suited to his circumstances*.—You know as much as is good for you, for it is with the mind as with the senses. A greater degree of hearing would incommode us; and a nicer degree of seeing would terrify us. If our eyes could see things microscopically, we should be afraid to move. Thus our knowledge is suited to our situation and circumstances. Were we informed more fully beforehand of the good things prepared for us by Providence, from that moment we should cease to enjoy the good we possess, become indifferent to present duties, and be filled with restless impatience. Or suppose the things foreknown were gloomy and adverse; what dismay and despondency would be the consequence of the discovery; and how many times should we suffer in imagination what we now only endure once in reality! Who would wish to draw back a veil which saves them from so many disquietudes? If some of you had formerly known the troubles through which you have since waded, you would have fainted under the prospect. But what we know not now we shall know hereafter. (*H. G. Salter.*) *The concealed processes of Providence*.—Machinery boxed in goes round and accomplishes its work as well as if it

were all exposed to view. At one extremity the raw material goes in, and at another the manufactured article comes out. This is all that the visitor sees. For once, and to instruct a stranger, the master may take the covering off, and lay bare the intricate accumulation of cylinders and wheels; but soon he shuts the door again. Thus has the Author of salvation in the case of some opened up in the processes of His providence, which are usually conducted in secret. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

Vers. 4, 5. Take away the dross from the silver, and there shall come forth a vessel for the finer.—*Purifying fires*:—No text in Scripture brings out with equal distinctness the higher office of affliction, *i.e.*, to develop in us preparation for a true usefulness. The object of furnace fires is not to melt the precious metal, or even to release the dross, but to make the metal ready for the purposes of manufacture. Not the silver ingot, however, but the silver vessel, is the object of the assayer. When God tries His children, it is not simply that they shall “come forth as gold,” glorious as is purity of character, but that they may be both ready to be shaped for His purposes and capable of being used to fulfil His will. Paul seems to refer to this proverb in 2 Tim. ii. 19–21, the only other passage in which the same truth is taught by the same figure. (*Homiletic Review.*) **Take away the wicked from before the king.**—*The removal of wicked men from influential positions*:—This shows that the vigorous endeavour of a prince to suppress vice, and reform the manners of his people is the most effectual way to support his government. **I. WHAT THE DUTY OF MAGISTRATES IS.** To “take away the wicked”; to use their power for the terror of evil works and evil-workers, to banish those from the court who are vicious and profane, and to frighten them, and restrain them from spreading the infection of their wickedness among the people. Wicked people are the dross of a nation. **II. THE ADVANTAGE OF DOING THIS DUTY.** 1. It will be the bettering of their subjects. They shall be made like silver refined; fit to be made vessels of honour. 2. It will be the settling of the prince. “His throne shall be established in this righteousness,” for God will bless his government, the people will be pliable to it, and so it will become durable. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Vers. 8–10. Go not forth hastily to strive.—*The worst and best ways of treating social dissensions*:—The social dissensions that are rife in our world are incontestable proofs that humanity has fallen from its normal condition. There is society in heaven, but no social differences or strifes. The text indicates the best and the worst way of treating such dissensions. **I. THE WORST WAY.** “Go not forth hastily to strive.” 1. Precipitant strife is bad in itself. Men should never be hasty in yielding to a passion. They should make the passion, however strong and tumultuous for the moment, the subject of thought, and by thought should subdue, purify, and direct it. 2. Precipitant strife exposes to shame. “Lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.” **II. THE BEST WAY.** “Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself,” &c. The direction here seems to imply three things—1. That an interview is to be obtained at once with the offender. “Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself.” 2. That an interview is to be obtained in order to talk the offence over. “Debate thy cause.” 3. That the offence must be thus debated before the secret is divulged to another. “Discover not a secret to another.” 4. That should the secret be divulged to another the pacific objects of the interview might be nullified. “Lest he that heareth it,” &c. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 11. A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.—*The lessons of the orange-tree*:—“Apples of gold” is a poetic name for the orange in more than one Eastern tongue. “Pictures of silver” may be a figure for the creamy-white blossoms of the orange-tree. No one who has seen orange-trees in full blossom and full bearing can have failed to notice how the beauty of the golden fruit is set off by its framework of white fragrant blossoms. “Fitly spoken” is in the margin “a word spoken in season”—a timely, opportune word. Delitzsch renders, “according to circumstances,” by which is meant a good word adapted to time and audience and to all the conditions of the time. Most of us can remember some word spoken in the very nick of time and so happily adapted to our conditions at the moment that it largely influenced our whole subsequent career. But perhaps the meaning is a word which was the fittest, the most perfect and beautiful expression of the thought which had to be uttered. “A word spoken on its wheels.”

Every kind of thought has its appropriate expression in language. What the wise man bids us admire is those weighty and happy sentences which embody a noble thought in words of answering nobleness. 1. This is the first lesson of the orange-tree—that a happy, a fair and noble utterance of a wise thought gives it a new charm, a new and victorious energy. Distinction of style is almost as potent—if indeed it is not even more potent—on the life and fame of a book as depth or originality of thought. 2. All force becomes most forcible when it is smoothly and easily exerted. It is not effort, strain, violence which tell in action any more than in language, but gentleness, calmness, a gracious mastery and smiling ease. The wiser you are the less passionate, the less vehement, the less overbearing you will be. Great forces are calm and gentle because they are irresistible. Calmness, composure, gentleness are signs of strength. 3. Religion is most potent when it is clothed with grace. A genial and friendly godliness is like the ruddy fruit of the orange-tree encircled and set off by its wealth of white, odorous blooms. There was much that was admirable in the Puritan conception of religion; but though its heart was sound its face wore a frown. And in many of us religion still wears a sour and forbidding face. Some there are who still suspect beauty, culture, scholarship, mirth, and even devotion to God and man, if it take any form other than that which they approve and prefer. Such people do not render religion attractive. Let us learn the lesson of the orange-tree, and the greatest lesson of all—the lesson of charity. (*Samuel Cox, D.D.*)

Apples of gold in pictures of silver:—The term translated “fity” is a very curious one in the original Hebrew. It signifies “wheels,” and the marginal reading is “a word spoken on his wheels,” which means a word that rolled smoothly and pleasantly from the lips of the speaker to the ears of the hearer. In ancient times the carts had no wheels, and most things were carried on horseback. There were no roads, and the carts were put on long shafts, the two ends of which rested on the ground, and were dragged along by the horse with great difficulty, making deep ruts in the ground. The first wheels that were used in our country were very clumsy and rough. Modern wheels are light, and turn easily. The wise man says that each of your words should be like a vehicle on easy-going wheels, so smooth and courteous that it would produce no jar or shock to either speaker or hearer; not hurt by any harshness or roughness, or leave a painful rut behind in the memory. People in the East are remarkable for the grace and courtesy of their speech. They carry this sometimes too far, and are guilty of insincerity and exaggeration. We are apt to err in the other direction, and make our speech too rough and harsh, fancying that we cannot be true and sincere if we are polite. We are not so careful of our words as we ought to be. The text directs our thoughts to the surpassing excellence of gentle and kindly speech. Cultivated society is so pleasant to live in, because the people who move in it have learned to control their tempers, are polite and forbearing to each other, and do not say things that grate upon the feelings and leave a sting behind. But while good society gives an outward and artificial politeness, the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus gives true inward refinement and civility. It enables us to be truly considerate, bearing with the failings of some, overlooking the weaknesses of others, and having a good word to say of every one. It puts a wheel on every one of your words, so that it may glide smoothly. There are persons who grudge to say a word of praise to others, however deserving. Frankly praise what is worthy of praise, and your words will be sweet and pleasant to yourselves as well as to others. There is a temptation to be clever and say smart things, and to use words of sarcasm or ridicule at the expense of those who are not so quick-witted as yourselves. Be very careful in finding fault with people, lest you should make the offender an enemy. In the text “apples” probably should be “oranges,” and this fruit gives a more suggestive figure. The flowers and fruit may be found together on the orange-tree throughout the whole year. The leaves are evergreen and of a cheerful, glossy green, and the flowers of a brilliant white, with a most delicious scent. So is the exceeding comeliness of a wise and gentle employment of your words. A word fity spoken can administer an all-round delight in the same way. We speak about the language of flowers and of flowery language. It would be well if there was more of this attractiveness in our speech. The old Athenian laws required that a newly-married couple, when they were alone, should first eat a quince together, in token, as this fruit was the symbol of good-will, that their conversation should be mutually pleasant. And so your religion requires, in all your intercourse with one another, that you should first eat the quince of good-will, and be careful in choosing smooth words that have no sharp edges to cut and

wound, that roll easily and pleasantly on wheels without making any jars or ruts. Over against all apples of discord that cause alienation and strife and misfortune set the golden apples of gentle, kind, considerate words that will win all hearts around you and sweeten the air and smooth all the rough things of the world. (*Hugh Macmillan, D.D.*)

The excellency of fitly-spoken words:—The comparison here has undoubtedly an allusion to some old domestic ornament. "The idea," says Stuart, "is that of a garment of precious stuff, on which are embroidered golden apples among picture work of silver. Costly and precious was such a garment held to be: for besides the ornaments upon it, the material itself was of high value." Others think that the allusion is to a kind of table ornament, constructed of a silver basket of delicate lattice-work, containing gold in the form of apples. The basket would, of course, be so constructed as to show off with advantage its precious treasure, the apple of gold. The ancient Easterners were men of taste and men of art; they loved the beautiful, and they had their ornaments: and some of their ornaments were as exquisitely constructed as those of any scenes or times. I. Words fitly spoken must be words fitted to EXHIBIT THE TRUTH TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE. They must be to the truth what the basket was to the apples of gold—an instrument for showing them off to the best advantage. There are words that hide the truth; they are so profuse and luxuriant that they bury the priceless flower in their wilderness. There are words that disgrace the truth; they are ill-chosen, mean, suggestive of low and degrading associations.

II. Words fitly spoken must be words ADAPTED TO THE MENTAL MOOD OF THE HEARER. 1. Different men have different mental moods. Some are naturally sombre, imaginative, and practical; others are gay, poetic, and speculative. Words fitly spoken must be adapted to each particular mood: the form in which truth would suit one mood would be inapt to another. 2. The same man has different moods at different times. Circumstances modify the condition of the soul. Hence "a word fitly spoken" must be a word presenting truth adapted to the soul in its existing mood. It must be a word in due season. III. Words fitly spoken should be words SPOKEN IN THE RIGHT SPIRIT. IV. NATURALLY-FLOWING WORDS. "Spoken upon his wheels." Not forced or dragged words. Let us all endeavour to use the right words in the family, in the market, in the schools, in the debate, in the pulpit, on the platform, and in the press. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Apples of gold:—Things of rare worth and beauty are words "fitly spoken," words that fit the case and match the opportunity. The human voice can do what nothing else can. Of some men's words we are sure that they are "apples of gold." Such are the words of the prophets who come with messages of hope and warning. Among words of truth and beauty are—1. Words of comfort. We have no distance to go to find a human life that needs a consoling word. On the next foot of land to yours stands a man who craves for comfort. There are times in life when the word of instruction would be an injury and the elaborated argument a great hurt, as neither would minister to the mind diseased; but simple, earnest, heartfelt words, born of sympathy, are veritable "apples of gold." 2. Words of counsel. These are not always welcome. Our independent spirit will not permit us to invite or accept them. Yet many a man traces the turning-point of his career to the time when he acted on some word of good counsel. The word of experience is often the word wanted. 3. Words of encouragement. The world will never know what it owes to those people who have encouraged others. To encourage a man is to help him to turn some of the possibilities within him into actual achievements. Let us give God thanks for all those winsome servants of His who walk their appointed ways across His world, speaking as they go the encouraging word. (*Albert J. Shorthouse.*)

Words on wheels:—A wonderful deal of good often comes from what Solomon calls "a word fitly spoken." The Hebrew for "fitly spoken" here means "set on wheels." All our words are set on wheels. If they are good words, they are wheeling on for good. If they are evil words, they go wheeling on for evil. Remember this. *A word fitly spoken*:—A certain Baptist merchant of Richmond became seriously embarrassed in his business. The report went out that he had failed, and caused much painful surprise. A few days after the suspension of his business Dr. Jeter, in passing down the aisle of the church one Sunday morning, met him. He grasped him by the hand with unwonted warmth, and said, "How are you, brother? I have heard fine news about you." Just about that time the sad brother was feeling that all the news concerning him was of the worst sort. With mingled surprise and curiosity he asked the doctor what he had heard. "Why, I heard that you had failed in business, and failed honestly. It is nothing

to lose your money if you have been able to retain your integrity." The kind word went far to reconcile the brother to his misfortunes. He did "fail honestly," and not long after started again, and rose to high prosperity. (*From "Life of Dr. Jeter."*)

Ver. 13. As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to them that send him.—*The value of a good messenger to his employers*:—It is not necessary to imagine that Solomon here indicates the occurrence in Judea of snow in the time of harvest. It is very improbable that a snowstorm ever happened in that country during that period. The ancients in the East did as we do, preserve the ice and snow of winter in order to cool our summer beverages. A cold draught on a hot summer's day was there, as here, most refreshing. What such a beverage was to the thirsty man in the heat of a tropical summer, is a faithful messenger to the soul of his master. Our subject is the value of a good messenger to his employer. I. HIS CHARACTER is refreshing to his master. What more pleasing to an employer than the development of fidelity in his servants? To see them faithful, not only to their engagements, but faithful to moral truth and to God. Even the Eternal Master of us all is pleased with the fidelity of His servants. II. HIS INFLUENCE is refreshing to his master. 1. His service will be likely to inspire his master with confidence in him. He calmly relies upon his representative. 2. His service will be likely to awaken general respect for his master. A "faithful messenger" can scarcely fail to bring honour to his master. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 15. By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone.—*The power of gentleness*:—In the government of our words, mildness, or meekness, is specially commendable. The right disposition includes meekness, gentleness, courteousness, kindness. These are the virtues of a soft tongue. The opposites are hardness, roughness, sharpness, bitterness, clamour, brawling. By the term "breaking" is meant persuading, pacifying, convincing, appeasing, prevailing with. A meek and gentle way of discourse is the most effectual means to overcome the fiercest passions and most obdurate, cruel dispositions. A calm and gentle way in vindicating ourselves is the most effectual means to work confusion in such as would calumniate and reproach us. This truth may be confirmed by two considerations. 1. The nature of these fierce passions and this obduracy or hardness of temper, which are increased by opposition, and consequently must be abated by gentleness and yielding. 2. From the nature of lenity and gentleness, whose property it is to insinuate itself into the hardest things. It is compared with oil. How does this doctrine consist with the imprecations of Scripture? Explain that some of them, though pronounced optatively, are to be understood declaratively, as descriptive of the true state and condition of such parties. Those who used these imprecations were inspired for a particular purpose. They spoke in their zeal for God. It may be right to wish evil to come to persons for the sake of its disciplinary mission. How does this doctrine consist with the severe imprecations of Scripture? Our Saviour called the Pharisees "vipers," Herod a "fox." The apostle calls some people "dogs." To this it may be said, those who have an extraordinary power of discerning may use such hard terms. And those in public stations may thus severely chide and reprehend. How does this doctrine consist with the duties of zeal and reproving, which sometimes must be done with severity? A man may sometimes sin in not being angry. True "meekness of wisdom" directs a man how to order his zeal and rebukes. Learn—1. That if soft words be of such a prevailing efficacy, soft and gentle actions must be so too. 2. The folly and sinfulness of hard speeches, whereby others may be provoked to anger and offence. 3. The lawfulness and fitness of giving men the reverence and honour due to their proper titles. 4. Bitter and provoking words are unmanly, as being against the rules of morality and very un-Christian, as being against the precepts of the gospel. (*Bp. John Wilkins.*) *The manifestation and mightiness of moral power*:—There are three kinds of power—material, mental, and moral. I. THE MANIFESTATION OF moral power. The words indicate a threefold manifestation. 1. Stillness. "By long forbearing is a prince persuaded." Forbearance implies calm endurance—a patience like that which the Great Heavenly Exemplar exhibited under insults and persecutions. 2. Speech. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." "A soft tongue"—not a simpering tongue, not a silly tongue, not a sycophantic tongue, but the "soft tongue" of tender love and forbearing kindness. Such a tongue is might: it "breaketh the bone." This somewhat paradoxical expression expresses the

amazing power of kind words; they break the bone, the ossified heart of the enemy. Another manifestation of power here is—3. Service. "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink," &c. "In the smelting of metals," says Arnot, "whether on a large or small scale, it is necessary that the burning coals should be above the ore as well as beneath it. The melting fuel and the rude stones to be melted are mingled together and brought into contact, particle by particle, throughout the mass. It is thus that the resistance of the stubborn material is overcome, and the precious separated from the vile." There are but few hearts so obdurate as not to melt under the fires of love that blaze over and under them. These words direct our attention to—II. THE MIGHTINESS of moral power. 1. Persuading. "By long forbearing is a prince persuaded." Thus David brought down Saul (1 Sam. xxiv. 8-20, xxvi. 3-20). 2. Breaking. "A soft tongue breaketh the bone." Loving words can mollify the roughest natures. Gideon, with a kind word, pacified the Ephraimites, and Abigail turned David's wrath away. 3. Melting. "Thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." "The Americans have a tract on this subject, entitled, 'The Man who Killed his Neighbours.' It contains, in the form of a narrative, many useful, practical suggestions on the art of overcoming evil with good. It is with kindness—modest, thoughtful, generous, persevering, unwearied kindness—that the benevolent countryman killed his churlish neighbour: and it is only the old evil man that he kills, leaving the new man to lead a very different life in the same village, after the dross has been purged away." How sublimely elevated is the moral legislation of the Bible! (D. Thomas, D.D.) *The power of Christian kindness*:—There is a tremendous power in a kind word. 1. Kindness as a means of defence. Have you ever known acerbity and acrimonious dispute settle a quarrel? I have seen men moving amid the annoyances, and vexations, and assaults of life in such calm Christian deliberation that all the buzzing around about their soul amounted to nothing. They conquered them, and, above all, conquered themselves. 2. Kindness as a means of usefulness. In all communities you find sceptical men. How shall you capture them for God? Sharp argument and sarcastic retort never yet won a single soul from scepticism to the Christian religion. When such are brought in, it is through the charm of some genial soul, and not by argument at all. Men are not saved through the head; they are saved through the heart. The same thing is true in the reclamation of the openly vicious. Was ever a drunkard saved through the caricature of a drunkard? You can never drive man, woman, or child into the kingdom of God. (T. De Witt Talmage, D.D.)

Ver. 16. **Hast thou found honey? eat so much as is sufficient for thee, lest thou be filled therewith, and vomit it.**—*Religion and pleasure*:—It is a mistaken notion that religion is a melancholy business, and the enemy of pleasure. Christianity is supposed to be synonymous with inanity, and to impose a weariness alike on flesh and spirit that stifles the freedom, represses the elasticity, and dulls the brightness which are the natural and precious heritage of youth. But this is as false as the devil who coined it. I stand here as the messenger of God, as the champion of pleasure, the advocate of hilarity, the apostle of enjoyment, the prophet of light-heartedness. Pleasure is a necessity of our nature. The goodness of God has made bountiful provision for full satisfaction and delight. The body is endowed with senses capable of exquisite sensations of delight. When you talk of the melancholy of religion you become the Pharisaic boaster, and not I. You thank your God that you are not as other men. If the intellect seeks pleasure in the study of the physical universe, does the Christian philosopher discover less to charm his mind than do his scientific comrades of less assured belief? But ours is a triple manhood. There is the moral and spiritual man. Surely there is honey in doing right; there is pleasure in goodness and truth. As to the honey of life to be found in a good conscience, in doing right, in walking uprightly, according to the universally recognised laws of morality, surely the Christian has a better chance than the ordinary man. What does religion allow, or rather enjoin, in the way of pleasant recreations? 1. They must do me no harm; neither enfeeble my body, rob my brain of its vital energy, or disturb my inward sense of right. 2. They must recreate my body; brace it up, and leave me readier for after-service. 3. They must refresh my mind; not make it sluggish, heavy, depressed, and ill at ease. 4. They must cheer my heart—in their present influence, in their results, and in their memory. (J. Jackson Wray.) *The use of honey*:—1. The Bible does not prohibit pleasure. It does not say to the man

who has found honey, "Eat it not!" but "Eat so much as is sufficient for thee." What the Bible forbids is excess. 2. In prohibiting such pleasures, the Bible proceeds upon a principle of benevolence. "Eat no more than is sufficient for thee!" Why? Not because pleasure is grudged, but because pain is deprecated. 3. The principle upon which the Bible proceeds in this matter is a benevolent one, because it accords with the constitution of our nature. There is a point at which pleasure becomes pain. It is the law of our being, that if pleasure is to remain pleasure, it must be enjoyed moderately and intermittently. (*Homiletic Review.*) *Pleasure:—*

I. THE PERMISSION. 1. Pleasure is a necessity of our nature. (1) A necessity of its complex constitution. We are made to enjoy. We have capacity for—(a) Animal pleasure; (b) intellectual pleasure; (c) moral pleasure; (d) religious pleasure; (e) social pleasure. (2) A necessity of its instinctive desires. We have an intense craving for enjoyment. "Who will show us any good?" This yearning for enjoyment, found alike amid the refinements of civilisation as amid the rudeness of barbarism, alike in the mansion of the rich as in the cottage of the poor, alike by the learned philosopher as by the illiterate peasant. (3) A necessity of its perfect development. 2. Pleasure is a possibility of our condition. God, the all-wise and all-kind, has not only made us for pleasure and given us a strong desire for it, but has also bountifully surrounded us with its sources. (1) For the animal faculties. There is light for the eye, music for the ear, fragrance for the smell. (2) For the intellectual. The universe is a problem for our study. (3) For the moral. The true and good are around us, in the character of God, the actions of the good, &c. (4) For the religious. God in Christ is revealed as the Object of worship. (5) For the social. There is society, with its varied life. 3. Pleasure is an element of our religion. Christianity is not a morbid, ascetic system. "Rejoice in the Lord always."

II. THE LIMITATION: "Eat so much as is sufficient for thee." Pleasure is not to be indulged indiscriminately and unlimitedly. We must indulge in such pleasures only as are—1. Dignified in their nature. We must remember the spirituality of our nature and the immortality of our being. We are not animals. Let us not make the mistake of the rich fool. We are made in God's image, and are capable of high and noble joys. 2. Beneficial in their influence. Pleasure must not be sought and indulged in on its own account, but as a means toward the attainment of a higher end. The objects of pleasure are—to recreate the body; to refresh the mind; to cheer the heart; to fit us for the work of life. 3. Christian in their sanction. 4. Proportionate in their degree. Pleasure must not be the end of life. It must not be pastime. Time is too valuable to be frittered away. (*Thomas Baron.*) *The world's honey:—*

I. The world has its honey. 1. It has a gastric honey. What pleasures can be derived from a participation in the precious fruits of the earth! 2. It has a gregarious honey. How great the pleasure men have in mingling with their kind, merely as social animals; the pleasure of mates, parents, children. 3. It has a secular honey. Pursuit, accumulation, and use of wealth. 4. It has æsthetic honey. The beautiful in nature, art, music. 5. It has intellectual honey. Inquiry into, and discovery of, the Divine ideas that underlie all the forms, and ring through all the sounds of nature.

II. The world's honey may be abused. 1. Some eat too much of the gastric honey, and become gourmands, epicures, voluptuaries. 2. Some eat too much of the gregarious honey, and become profligate debauchees, bloated animals. 3. Some eat too much of the secular honey, and become wretched misers, haunted with a thousand suspicions. 4. Some eat too much of the æsthetic honey, and grow indifferent to everything but what they consider the beautiful and harmonious. 5. Some eat too much of the intellectual honey, and they have no life but in that of observatories, laboratories, and libraries. III. The world's honey abused produces nausea. Over-indulgence in any worldly pleasure issues in a moral sickness and disgust. There is what the French call the *ennui* that comes out of it—"that awful yawn," says Byron, "which sleep cannot abate." The intemperate use of this honey often makes life an intolerable burden. Conclusion: Take care how you use the world. You may have too much of a good thing. There is a honey, thank God! of which you cannot take too much, which will never surfeit or sicken—that is, the honey of spiritual enjoyment; the enjoyment of studying, imitating, worshipping Him in whose presence there is fulness of joy, &c. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Vers. 17-20. *Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house.—Bad neighbours:—* Here are four kinds. I. THE INTRUSIVE. It is pleasant to be visited by a neighbour whose interest is genuine. Two evils accrue to those neighbours whose visits are

intrusive. 1. They become tiresome. There is nothing fresh about them. 2. They become disliked. The natural consequence of irksomeness. Be not too intimate with any. Livy remarks "that the perfection of good behaviour is for a man to retain his dignity without intruding on the liberty of another." Another bad neighbour here indicated is—II. THE SLANDEROUS. "A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour is a maul, and a sword, and a sharp arrow." 1. A maul. This old English word, which is now obsolete, signifies a hammer or a club, an implement used in the rough warfare of fighting men in old times. 2. A sword. Another deadly implement, that by which millions of men have been cut down in all ages. 3. A sharp arrow. Another weapon of destruction. A slanderous neighbour is as mischievous as any or all of these murderous weapons. He knocks, he cuts, he pierces; he destroys you by his tongue. Not your body, but your plans, your prosperity, your reputation, your happiness. Another bad neighbour here indicated is—III. THE FAITHLESS. "Confidence in an unfaithful man, in time of trouble, is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint." 1. That the unfaithful man fails. Like the "broken tooth" and the "foot out of joint," he fails to fulfil what is required of him. Just when you want to eat, you find that the tooth is broken and useless; just when you rise to walk, you find that your foot is out of joint. Just so with the faithless man. All his old promises of friendship prove to be lies, nothing less. 2. The unfaithful man pains you. In the use of the broken tooth and the disjointed foot when you try them, there is not only disappointment, but torture. Such is the mental distress which is caused by the failure of confidence, in proportion to the degree in which you had cherished it. Especially is this felt "in time of trouble," when help is so particularly needed. To trust and be deceived is at any time a bitter trial. IV. THE INJUDICIOUS. "As he that taketh away a garment in cold weather, and as vinegar upon nitre, so is he that singeth songs to an heavy heart." When you are in trouble there are neighbours whose attempt to comfort you is as absurd and as ineffective as the taking away from a man his garment in cold weather, and as giving to a thirsty man vinegar upon nitre to drink. 1. The injudicious comforter is one who presents incongruous subjects. Sometimes he will talk on worldly subjects, subjects of gain, fashion, and amusement, when the distressed mind is sorely agitated with serious thoughts. 2. The injudicious comforter is one who presents proper subjects in an incongruous spirit. He talks of the right things, but talks of them with a spirit unsympathetic, sometimes undevout, canting, cold, and dogmatic. Such a man's comfort is indeed vinegar on nitre, conflicting, irritating, and painful. (*Ibid*)

Ver. 19. **Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint.**—*Man trusting in man*:—This is sometimes a great evil. To trust in man and disregard God, or to repose in man the confidence that rightly belongs to God alone, is sinful and ruinous. But in some respects it is natural and right to trust our fellow-men. We are social beings. There can be no friendship without trust. It is right to trust our friends—1. For sympathy in joy or sorrow. 2. For help in time of need. 3. For honourable fidelity in all confidences. I. THE TEST OF MAN AS AN OBJECT OF TRUST. The "time of trouble" tests the faithfulness of those in whom we confide. Prosperity brings friends; adversity tests them. Three kinds of trouble test man as an object of trust—1. Trouble in our circumstances, or loss and poverty. 2. Trouble in our reputation, or misrepresentation and slander. 3. Trouble in our character, or sin. For a truly Christian man may fall into grievous sin. II. THE FAILURE OF MAN AS AN OBJECT OF TRUST. 1. The unfaithful man in time of trial fails those who trust him. 2. The failure of the unfaithful man in time of trial is painful to those who trust him. The attempt to use the broken tooth or dislocated joint causes suffering. Some of the keenest anguish of human souls is caused by the failure of those in whom they trusted. Learn—(1) To be faithful to every trust reposed in us. (2) To be careful in whom we repose confidence. (3) To prize those whose trustworthiness we have proved. (4) To place our supreme trust in God. (*William Jones*.)

Ver. 23. **The north wind driveth away rain: so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.**—*Righteous anger*:—The marginal reading, which is, "The north wind bringeth forth rain: so doth a backbiting tongue an angry countenance," gives quite the opposite sense. In Arabia the north wind blew over a long tract of dry land, and therefore usually brought dry weather (Job xxvii. 21); but in Judea the north wind, including all the winds between the north and north-west,

blew from the Mediterranean Sea, and therefore commonly brought rain. Accepting the marginal version, the idea is, that as the north wind brings forth rain, a backbiting tongue brings forth an angry countenance. But our version, which we think equally faithful to the original, gives an idea equally good and important; it is, that an expression of displeasure in the listener will silence the tongue of the backbiter. The anger referred to here is a righteous anger; its object is legitimate, its expression is natural, its influence is useful. I. ITS OBJECT IS LEGITIMATE. It is directed against "a backbiting tongue." A backbiter is a clandestine traducer of character. His speech goes to damage another's reputation behind his back. He does it sometimes by telling truth as well as falsehood. A man need not tell lies to be a backbiter; he can do it by parading damaging facts, and such damaging facts may be found in the chapters of every man's life. He does it sometimes unmaliciously. He may be prompted by vanity; he may disparage another in order to set himself off to better advantage. He may do it from greed; his object may be to rob the subject of his talk of some share of his patronage and support. II. ITS EXPRESSION IS NATURAL. "An angry countenance." The countenance is a fuller, more faithful, and forceful revealer of the soul than the tongue. An admiring look has often won hearts which no words could enlist. A courageous look in the leaders of campaigns wakes the invincible in battalions. A reproving look has broken hearts, as Christ's broke the heart of Peter. An angry look, not a mere peevish, petulant look, but a look of right down honest anger, directed to a backbiter, would send him in mute confusion from your presence. III. ITS INFLUENCE IS USEFUL. "The north wind driveth away rain, so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue." (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 25. As cold waters to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country.—*Good news from a far country*:—We live in a little world. It is simply that we are a part of it that it seems to us so great. By the multiplying of our interests in these days of change and travel, there is many a far country from which good news comes to us as cold waters to a thirsty soul. Think of that far country, heaven, and the soul's yearning for good news thence. Every righteous thought, every pure, simple, generous purpose, every lowly resolve, every warning of conscience within condemning wrong, every conception that seems to be wooing to holiness and sincerity, is a message from that far country. Well is it when they come to thirsting souls. There are many difficulties about a revelation from God. If we should be compelled to let miracles go, how simple is righteousness, how plain is love, how clear is purity! Who shall say that there are no messages from the far country? There may be uncertainties about many things, but there cannot be uncertainties here. It must be right that I love right, that I do right. God cares for His child—cares that its life shall be right and true and holy; that its sins shall be blotted out. All revelation is not in the Bible. It is rather a record of a revelation. Such records, too, are elsewhere. I lift my eyes to the nightly heaven, and the record is there. I look upon the new-born spring, and the record is there. I look into the heart of a little child, and the record is there. What is the sum of all revelations; what is the revelation? Just Christ, the dear Saviour—His compassions, His infinite redemption, the great message; He Himself the living Message-bearer from the far country. All other good news is gathered about this. We cannot separate redeeming love from any other gift of our Father's care. Common news from a far country will often, in this world of change, cheer you and me. We live in a world of separations and farewells. Our paths, with most of us, are together only for a little while. Countries far apart separate the members of the one family of God. But nowhere can they be where God is not. And members of the one family shall cheer each other's heart with news from a far country. The news shall tell how God is leading all by different paths, the right way for each, to the one city of habitation. (*T. Gasquoine, B.A.*) *Tidings from a far country*:—Our interest in tidings from a far country may be based on many considerations. 1. We may be interested in the novelty and the strangeness of the information which reaches us about a foreign country, and the more so if any of our friends have been engaged in the exploration—e.g., Columbus returning from America, or Captain Cook from the South Seas. 2. If we have received any great possessions from that country: as Solomon hearing about India and China, when his merchants returned with gold, &c., from that country. 3. If any great stranger or dear friend has come from it—e.g., Solomon, hearing about Sheba or Egypt; or the English about Sardinia, when the king came over. 4. If any of our friends are

there now—*e.g.*, as news from Australia, America, or any other country, where we have friends. If it be good news, how it revives and cheers us! Perhaps our friends are doing business for us successfully. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*) *Good news from a far country*:—The traveller on a hot summer's day, parched with thirst, can easily understand the allusion, "cold waters to a thirsty soul." They are cooling, refreshing, and invigorating, and enable him to pursue his journey with "strength renewed." Not unfrequently they have been the means of saving life—*e.g.*, Hagar in the wilderness (Gen. xxi. 14–20); Samson after slaying the Philistines (Judg. xv. 18, 19). But the comparison is with good news. Who does not love to hear good news? How exhilarating the news brought to old Jacob respecting his son Joseph (Gen. xlv. 26–21); how joyful the tidings brought by messengers relating to the restoration of the Jews (Isa. lii. 7); how jubilant the feelings of the apostle, when bound at Rome, on hearing favourable reports of the Colossian and Philippian converts! He again "thanked God and took courage." 1. The first piece of good news is this, that the treaty of peace has been signed. "Unto you is born a Saviour." 2. So fascinating is that country that there will be no fear of disappointment when we visit it, no wanting to return again on earth. 3. That country has very great attractions. It is—(1) A land of plenty. Failure and starvation, known, alas! often bitterly here. (2) A land of perfection. Failure of ideals here. (3) A land of victory. (4) A land of friendships. (*G. P. Story.*) *Good news*:—I. WHAT THIS GOOD NEWS IS. It is an assurance of the most stupendous and amazing love of the greatest of all Beings. 1. It consists in pardon and peace. 2. It is the means of conveying everlasting joy. 3. It is the revelation of God to the soul. 4. It is the knowledge of sin atoned for; of the law fulfilled; of Satan conquered; of death vanquished; and of heaven opened. II. THIS GLORIOUS NEWS INFORMS US OF THE STUPENDOUS WAY WHEREBY THIS BLESSED INTELLIGENCE IS CONVEYED. It is conveyed through Christ as the author of salvation. III. WE MUST FIRST BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH THE PERSON SENDING, AND COUNTRY FROM WHENCE, AS WELL AS THE COMMUNICATION SENT, BEFORE WE SHALL ESTEEM IT AS GOOD NEWS. 1. The Spirit of God must open and shine into our minds. 2. He must subdue our worldly affections. 3. He must conquer our stubborn wills. 4. And daily read this good news to our souls. (*T. B. Baker.*) *Echoes from afar*:—1. It is a far country, possibly, as measured by distance, this heaven that we talk about. I prefer to believe that the dwelling-place of Deity is near at hand, that the sainted dead are separated from us only by the thick, dense, fleshly veil which envelops our free soul, so that we can neither feel, nor hear, nor see. Heaven lies near to the habitations of the just. 2. But heaven is a "far country," as being far away beyond our comprehension. It is so utterly far beyond our experience, so surpasses our comprehension, so outstrips our thought and conception, that even the aid of revelation does give us dim glimpses of the distant splendours. 3. Heaven is a "far country," because we are by nature so disqualified from inhabiting it. We speak of the fall of man, and this is the measure of it—a fall from paradise to perdition—a fall that only power Divine can span. From this "far country" good news has come. News from a far country is interesting to us, if it is from a strange land, unlike our own. If we have those who are near and dear to us dwelling in it. If we hope, or intend, to live in it by and by. Good news has come from this far country, the best and most glorious news that can fall on mortal ear. Angels have brought it. Jesus has brought it. The Holy Spirit has brought it. Holy men, moved by Him, have written and spoken it. Subtle, gracious, secret good news is brought from the far country still. (*J. Jackson Wray.*)

Ver. 27. **It is not good to eat much honey.**—*Natural desires running too far*:—Man is a creature of manifold desires. These desires may be divided into two grand classes—1. Those that can never go too far. Such are the desires for knowledge, holiness, assimilation to God. 2. Those that often run too far. Such are the desires for wealth; the desire for power, which often runs into tyranny; the desire for pleasure, which often runs into licentiousness. Here is running too far—I. THE DESIRE FOR ANIMAL PLEASURE. "It is not good to eat much honey." It is not good for the body. It is not good for the intellect. The rise of the animal is the fall of the mental. It is not good for the soul. The pampering of the senses is the death of the soul. "It is not good to eat much honey." Here we have running too far—II. THE DESIRE FOR HUMAN PRAISE. "So for men to search their own glory is not glory." The word "not," which is here in italics, is not in the original; it has been supplied by our translators. In doing so they have evidently

expressed the idea intended. A desire for the praise of our fellow-men is natural, innocent, and useful. It is very true that the praise of corrupt society is seldom of much worth, and often indeed contemptible. There are men whose desire for human praise becomes a passion; popularity is the god at whose shrine they are always paying their devotions. Be master of your desires. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *Pleasure and glory*.—The ordinary mind consents to this statement unwillingly. There is a natural reluctance to stop short in the pursuit of enjoyment. What glory can there be in getting a man to limit his own glory? I. OUR BEST INTERESTS ARE NOT SERVED BY LIVING CHIEFLY ON EARTHLY PLEASURES. Our highest being cannot be nourished by giving the chief place to earthly distinction and attainments. Life is not intended to be made up entirely of bank holidays and national festivals. Observe the point of emphasis in this verse. "It is not good to eat much honey." A little is all very well. The question of recreation and amusement resolves itself into a question about the desires and impulses which are allowed to rule men's lives. Let a man understand his true position. He is face to face with a long history of good and evil principles working on the one hand sublimity, and on the other disaster, in the lives of millions. He has to take his place—carefully discovering his right place—in a world that is darkened by the shadow of the crime and ignorance of ages, and torn to the heart's depth by the cruel wails of passion, and avarice, and remorse. II. GOD HAS SOMETHING BETTER FOR US TO DO, AND SOMETHING NOBLER FOR US TO ENJOY. He has called to us to seek the knowledge of Himself; to grow up into this knowledge of Himself; and to use the knowledge of Him, as it comes to us, for the benefit of the world. Learn to think soberly and proportionately of all the pleasures and distinctions of this life; ever having "respect unto the recompense of the reward." (*W. H. Jackson.*)

Ver. 28. He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, and without walls.—*Self-government essential to wisdom*.—Here is shown the ruinous condition of the person who has no rule over his own spirit. What can concern a man more than the art of self-government? It is inexcusable for a man to be a stranger to himself, and not to know how to make the best of his own natural powers and affections. I. WHAT IS IT TO HAVE RULE OVER OUR OWN SPIRITS? We ought to consider the entire constitution of our minds. There is something in the spirit which has a right to dominion, as being in its nature superior; there are other parts which hold an inferior place, and ought to be in subjection. There is conscience, a sense of duty and sin, and of moral good and evil; a necessary self approbation arising from the one, and reproach and condemnation from the other. And there are propensities in our minds arising on particular occasions of life. These have been conquered, and may be. II. WHERE IS THE PROPER AUTHORITY LODGED? Some things are necessary effects of laws of nature, and in relation to them man has no rule. A man can inquire and deliberate. The active powers may be suspended while we deliberate. To have rule over our own spirits is to keep the passions under an exact discipline. And there are natural desires in men of very unequal moment which often rise to passions. The true end of self-government is that the superior powers of the mind may be preserved in their due exercise. (*J. Abernethy, M.A.*) *The diversity of men's natural tempers*.—The spirit sometimes means a temper, disposition, or turn of mind, in general: thus we read of "an haughty spirit" and of "an humble spirit." This is, perhaps, the meaning of the expression in my text: by him that hath no rule over his own spirit may be meant the person who hath no government of his passions. But the expression may, without any impropriety, be taken for a man's particular temper or predominant turn of mind. God delights in variety throughout all His works. The same God is the Father of our spirits; and He has formed them also with considerable variety. All matter has the same essential properties; yet the forms into which God has moulded it, and the purposes to which He has applied the several parts of it, are infinitely different. In like manner the souls of all men are indued with the same faculties; but from the degrees in which they possess these faculties, and from the proportions in which they are combined, there results an endless diversity of characters in the human species. When the malevolent passions have a tendency to predominate in the soul, they occasion all those diversities of temper to which we apply the epithets sour, sullen, morose, severe, captious, peevish, passionate, ill-humoured, and the like. On the contrary, the prevalence of the benevolent affections of the heart produces a great variety of tempers, some of which we term the sweet, the gentle, the mild, the soft, the

courteous, the tender, the sympathising, the affectionate, the generous. We may observe further that very great diversities of temper may proceed from the same passion, only by its being predominant in different manners. The passionate temper and the peevish are extremely different; yet they both proceed from the predominance of the very same principle—sudden anger. Deliberate anger produces in those who have a propensity to it many distinctions of temper unlike to both these. It may be remarked likewise that some tempers proceed from the weakness of a particular disposition more properly than from a predominance of the contrary. Courage, so far as it is constitutional, proceeds merely from the absence of fear. Impudence is not the prevalence of any positive affection, but only the want of shame. A want or a relative weakness in any one of the numerous parts of a clock affects the soundness of the whole machine. The several passions and affections are, in different men, combined in an infinite variety of ways, and every particular combination of them produces a distinct temper. Perhaps every temper, when it is analysed, will be found not to arise from the prevalence of a single affection, but to derive its form in some degree from the union of several. Thus in a compounded colour different ingredients are mixed, and may be observed on attention, though one be so much predominant as to give it its common denomination. But it is not only by the prevalence of some of them in comparison with the rest that the passions produce diversities of temper among mankind: the general tone also of all the passions occasions a suitable peculiarity. A musical instrument acquires different tones by having all its strings wound up to different keys. The passions of different persons are as it were wound up to a variety of keys, and thence their souls derive distinct tones of temper. Though the passions be the most immediate causes of the varieties of temper, and though on that account they required our principal notice in explaining these varieties, yet it must be observed that some peculiarities of temper are occasioned almost wholly by the form of the intellectual powers. When the understanding is clear and decisive it lays the foundation of a firm and determined temper; an inability to form a clear opinion produces fickleness and inconsistency. The same temper may, in different men, proceed from different causes. The source of fickleness and inconstancy is sometimes weakness of judgment; sometimes timidity; and sometimes the keenness of all the passions, hurrying a man continually into new pursuits according as they happen to be excited in their turns. A temper of rashness may proceed from an improvident judgment, from the absence of fear and caution, or from the violence of any passion. As similar tempers may proceed from dissimilar causes, so even opposite tempers may proceed from the same cause. The sceptical temper and the credulous may ultimately be resolved into the same imbecility of understanding, an inability of clearly discerning the real force of evidence. This inability likewise gives rise to an obstinate temper in some, to a wavering temper in others: one is immovable in all his designs, because he is incapable of discerning the strength of those reasons which should persuade him to alter them; another is fickle in them all, because he cannot see the weakness of the reasons which are produced against them. Such are the general causes of the diversity of tempers among mankind. As no two plants are exactly alike, as no two human faces are absolutely undistinguishable, so no two tempers are perfectly the same. Every man has "his own spirit," his peculiar temper, by which he differs from every other man. 1. Each of us should study to know his own particular temper. The knowledge of our natural temper is one important part of the knowledge of ourselves. 2. A proper sense of the endless variety of tempers in the human species would lead us to make greater allowance for the sentiments and conduct of others than we often do. 3. The amazing diversity of tempers in the human species is a striking instance of the contrivance and wisdom of the God who made us. Variety, combined with uniformity, may be considered as the very characteristic of design; a perfect combination of them is an indication of perfect wisdom. (*Alex. Gerard, D.D.*) *The necessity of governing the natural temper*.—Is it, then, needful to evince the necessity of a man governing his own temper? Every man acknowledges that all others ought to govern their tempers, and complains of them when they do not. That we may perceive how much it is the duty of every one of us to govern his own temper, let us attend to the ill effects of neglecting to govern it. They are pointed out by an expressive figure in the text: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls"; he has no security against abandoning himself to every vice. Need I point out minutely the vices to which the indulgence

of a contracted and selfish temper naturally leads? The selfish affections are various; they turn to different objects; but it requires the strictest government to prevent a temper founded on the prevalence of any of them from degenerating into the correspondent vice, ambition, or vanity, or avarice, or sensuality, and the love of pleasure. It is still less necessary to enter into a long detail of the detestable vices which spring from a temper founded in a propensity to any of the malevolent passions. They lead to vices which spread misery through society, and which overwhelm the person himself with greater misery than he brings upon those around him. Habitual peevishness, producing fretfulness on every, the slightest, occasion, putting one out of humour with every person and every thing, creating incessant uneasiness to those who are connected with him, eating out the enjoyment of life, is the natural effect of a temper founded on a propensity to anger, though accompanied with the weakest tone of passion. In whatever way our temper most disposes the several passions and affections to exert themselves, it will, without regulation, prove the source of peculiar vices. When the propensity to desire renders the temper keen and eager, if we lay it under no restraint, it must engage us in trifling and vicious pursuits; in respect of the object of our pursuit, whether pleasure, profit, or power, it must render us craving and insatiable, ever unsatisfied with what we have obtained, wishing and plotting for more; and in respect of the means of prosecution, it must render us impetuous and violent, regardless of the bounds of right, impatient of every delay and opposition. Is the opposite propensity to aversion indulged? Everything wears a gloomy aspect, and is viewed on its darkest side: we act as if we were resolved never to be pleased; we search for occasions of disgust, regret, and uneasiness, and we find them in every object; every gentle affection is banished from the breast; discontent, fretfulness, and ill-humour become habitual. The same temper, it may be further observed, will lead a man, with equal readiness, into opposite vices in opposite situations. The same littleness of mind renders a man insolent in prosperity and abject in adversity. That vice, be it what it will, to which our particular temper directly leads us, is an enemy already advanced to the gates of the heart; and if it finds the heart "like a city without walls," it enters at its pleasure; we can make no resistance. But this is very far from being the whole effect of our neglecting to govern our natural temper: the man who ruleth not his spirit does not merely become enslaved to one vice; in consequence of this he is open to every vice. Every ruling sin will require from the man who lives in the indulgence of it the commission of many others for its support, for its gratification, or for disguising and concealing it. But it deserves to be particularly remarked that as soon as the misgovernment of natural temper has subjected a man to one ruling vice, he is no longer proof against even such vices as are in themselves most opposite to that very temper. Every one's observation will supply him with instances of persons who, being engaged in one vicious course, have by it been led into sins most contrary to their nature; with instances of the soft and gentle being brought to act with cruelty; of the benevolent and kind-hearted labouring to bring ruin upon those who happened to stand in the way of some unlawful project; of the generous, in the prosecution of some bad design, stooping to the most sordid actions; of the candid and open betrayed into schemes of artifice, dissimulation, and falsehood; of the timid rushing forward into the most dangerous crimes. Thus the man who abandons himself to that one vice which arises from the corruption of his natural temper is from that moment in danger of every sin. Every predominant vice requires as great a number of other vices to be subservient to it in the course of a wicked life as the ministers whom any tyrant can stand in need of to be the instruments of his cruelty, rapacity, and lusts. By being "like a city without walls," destitute of defence against any sin, he becomes "like a city broken down," reduced to ruins, desolated, uninhabited, and uninhabitable. Can you think without terror of the accumulated guilt of all these vices, and of the punishment to which they must expose you? Possessed and actuated by these emotions, be roused to every exertion for removing the faulty propensity of your nature. While you neglect to govern your natural temper, all your endeavours to avoid or to mortify the vices which spring from it will be but like lopping off a few twigs, which the vigour of the root will enable quickly to grow again, perhaps stronger and more luxuriant than before: it is only by setting yourselves at once to govern it, to rectify all its perversities, that you can lay the axe to the root of the tree, and effectually kill all the branches. (*Ibid.*) *The manner of governing the natural*

temper :—To extirpate one's natural temper is impossible. It is a distinguishing character, impressed on every soul by the hand of the Almighty, which the power of man can no more erase than it can efface the distinctive characters of the several kinds of plants and animals, and reduce them all to one kind. If it were possible for a man to destroy his peculiar temper, it would not be necessary; it would be even pernicious. Among all the varieties of temper which men possess there is not one inconsistent with virtue, there is not one which duty requires us to endeavour to extirpate. But though it be neither possible nor necessary to extirpate the natural temper, it is both possible and necessary to govern it. We every day meet with persons who, from good breeding, or from prudence, can disguise their temper and keep it from showing itself, not on one occasion, but on many occasions and through a long course of time; could not, then, better principles enable them to correct it? A physiognomist pretended to discover by his art that the great Athenian philosopher Socrates was addicted to vices so opposite to his whole conduct and character, that all who knew him were disposed to ridicule the pretensions of the physiognomist as absurd; but, to their astonishment, Socrates declared that he was, by his constitutional bias, prone to all the vices which had been imputed to him, and that it was only by philosophy that he had got the better of them. Would it not be shameful if many Christians could not make a similar declaration? 1. The first object of a man's care, in ruling his own spirit, is to refrain his natural bias, so that it may not become vicious, or lead him into sin. Every passion and affection is weak and pliable in the moment of its birth. Had we always recollection enough to observe, and resolution enough to check its first tendency to irregularity, our victory over it would be easy. But if we let slip this favourable moment, it will soon be able to carry us wherever it pleases. If, therefore, we would refrain our predominant passion, we must be at the greatest pains to avoid the objects, the opinions, the imaginations, which are favourable to its growth. In order to restrain our ruling passion it will often be necessary studiously to turn our attention to such objects, and to accustom ourselves to such actions as are most contradictory to it. When a twig has long been bent one way it cannot be made straight without being for some time bent the contrary way. The vices to which the natural temper gives us a propensity are those which we shall find the greatest difficulty in conquering, and which, after many defeats, will most frequently revolt. The last vices which a good man is able to subdue are his constitutional vices. 2. It implies that every man render his temper subservient to the practice of virtue and holiness. As every natural temper, even the most amiable, may degenerate into vice, so, on the contrary, every temper, even that which becomes most disagreeable by the smallest corruption of it, may be made to contribute to the virtue of the heart. Some turns of temper are naturally and strongly allied to virtue. All the tempers which are founded in a predominance of the kind affections are directly favourable to the love of mankind, to all the important virtues of benevolence and charity, and render the practice of every social duty easy and pleasant; or that they introduce a habit of soul congruous to the love of God, as well as to that inward serenity which characterises every grace, and renders it doubly amiable. Other turns of temper are, as it were, neutral between virtue and vice: in perceiving how these may be rendered serviceable to virtue there is little difficulty. The keen and eager temper in which desire is the chief ingredient, when directed to holiness as its object, will render a man spirited in the practice of it, and susceptible of a strong impulse from its joys and rewards. The contrary temper in which aversion prevails, tends to cherish a deep abhorrence of sin, which is one of the strongest securities against the indulgence of it. Both these tempers may become equally conducive to holiness by prompting us, the one to avoid evil, the other to do good. A high tone of passion, a sensibility, ardour, or activity of spirit, prepares the soul for entering into the raptures of devotion, for feeling the fervours of godly zeal, for showing eminent alacrity in every duty. A temper opposite to this may be improved into a settled composure and calm equability in the love and practice of holiness. It is more needful to observe, because it is not so obvious, that even those turns of temper which are most nearly allied to vice, and which are with the greatest difficulty kept from running into it, may notwithstanding be rendered subservient to virtue. Pride, for instance, may be improved into true dignity of character, into a noble and habitual disdain of every thought and action that is mean or base. An ambitious temper needs only to be fixed upon its properest objects in order to animate us in the indefatigable pursuits of that genuine honour which results from the approbation of God and

from the glories of heaven, and which will be bestowed only on the righteous, and in proportion to their righteousness. A temper which, by being neglected, would become blameably selfish and contracted, will, by being governed, become eminently conducive to prudence, and an incitement to diligence in that course of holiness which is our real wisdom and our best interest. Even that temper in which the malevolent affections tend to preponderate, the sour, the morose, the irascible, may be rendered subservient to our virtue and improvement: if it be curbed so strongly as not to lead us to hurt others, or to wish for their hurt, it will exert itself in a keen indignation against vice, a rigorous purity of heart, a blameless severity of manners; and it will make us inaccessible to many temptations which have great power over soft and gentle and social minds. 3. We ought not only to render our peculiar temper subservient to virtue, but also to incorporate it with all our virtues. All the good men whose lives the Scripture has recorded display different forms of holiness derived from their dissimilar tempers. Job is characterised by patience; Moses by meekness; David is high-spirited, his devotion is fervent, his virtues are all heroic; John and Paul are both warm, fervent, and affectionate, but the warmth of the former is sweet and gentle, that of the latter bold and enterprising. As every man thus derives from nature a distinct personal character, he ought to adhere to it, and to preserve its peculiar decorum. He can preserve it only by maintaining his own natural temper so far as it is innocent, and acting always in conformity to it. To conclude: If we would rule our own spirit, if we would govern our natural temper, let us restrain it from degenerating into vice, or leading us into sin. The means of governing our peculiar temper are the same with the means of performing every other duty, resolution, congruous exercises, watchfulness and prayer. But all these means we must in this case employ with peculiar care and diligence, because it is a matter of peculiar difficulty to control and regulate our predominant disposition. Its importance is, however, in proportion to its difficulty. If we can effectually accomplish this, it will render it the easier to subdue all our other irregular passions. They act in subordination to it, and derive a great part of their strength from it; and to subdue it is like cutting off the general who was the spirit of the battle, and on whose fall the army breaks and takes to flight. (*Ibid.*)

Self-government:—No man can be said to have attained complete rule over his own spirit who has not under his habitual control the tenor of his thoughts, the language of his lips, and motions of lust and appetite, and the energy of his passion. This shows you at once the extent, and the division of our subject. I. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE THOUGHTS. After all that has been written on the subject of self-command, the regulation of the thoughts has seldom drawn the attention of moralists. On the authority of silly maxims like these, that thought is free as air, that no one can help what he thinks, innumerable hours are wasted in idle reveries without the suspicion of blame. The time which we fondly supposed to be merely wasted in doing nothing may have been easily employed in mischievous imaginations, and thus what was considered as lost simply is found to be abused. When we reflect also that every licentious principle, every criminal project, and every atrocious deed is the fruit of a distempered fancy, whose roivings were originally unchecked till thoughts grew into desires, desires ripened into resolves, and resolves terminated in execution, well may we tremble at discovering how feeble is the control over our imaginations which we have hitherto acquired. We do not say that Cæsar, brooding over his schemes of ambition in his tent, was as guilty as Cæsar passing the Rubicon and turning his arms against his country; but we do say that licentiousness of thought ever precedes licentiousness of conduct; and that many a crime which stains human nature was generated in the retirement of the closet, in the hours of idle and listless thought, perhaps over the pages of a poisonous book, or during the contemplation of a licentious picture. II. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TONGUE. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." This will not appear an extravagant assertion when we consider how numerous are the vices in which this little member takes an active part. If we consider these vices of the tongue in the order of their enormity, we shall see how easily one generates another. Talkativeness, the venial offspring of a lively, not to say an unrestrained, fancy, hardly rises to a fault till it is found that he who talks incessantly must often talk foolishly, and that the prattle of a vain and itching tongue degenerates rapidly into that foolish talking and jesting which, as an apostle says, are not convenient. If for every idle, unprofitable, false or calumniating word which men shall speak they shall give an account in the day of judgment, what account shall those men render whose conversation first polluted the pure ear of

childhood, first soiled the chastity and whiteness of the young imagination, whose habitual oaths first taught the child to pronounce the name of God without reverence, or to imprecate curses on his mates with all the thoughtlessness of youth, but with all the passion and boldness of manhood? III. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE ANIMAL APPETITES. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." For how humiliating is the consideration, enough, indeed, to make us weep with shame, that man, the noblest work of God on earth, the lord of this lower world, that this noble creature should suffer himself to fall into the hands of the grovelling mob of appetites, and to be fettered by base lusts which ought to be his slaves—that this ethereal spirit should be wasted in the service of sensuality, and this intelligence, capable of mounting to heaven, be sunk and buried in the slime and pollution of gross and brutal pleasures! IV. THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PASSIONS. Not to be in a passion is generally the amount of the notion which the world entertains of self-command. In the broad scheme of gospel ethics, the opposite to anger is meekness; and meekness is no narrow or superficial virtue. The meek man of the gospel is the very reverse of those who act the most bustling and noisy part on the theatre of human life. He finds himself in a world where he will be oftener called to suffer than to act. He is not ambitious, because he sees little here worth ambition. Humility is the gentle and secret stream which runs through his life and waters all his virtues. To the government of the passions the principal prerequisite is the restriction of the desires; therefore, as he expects little from the world he will not often quarrel with it for the treatment he receives. (*J. S. Buckminster.*) *Self-control*:—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY NOT HAVING RULE OVER OUR OWN SPIRIT? 1. Intemperance of feeling, especially angry feeling. 2. Extravagance of speech. 3. Rashness of conduct. 4. Hence the formation of pernicious habits. II. THE EVIL OF LACKING SELF-CONTROL. It destroys the walls of our city, and exposes us—1. To the inroads of sin; and is itself sin. 2. To insult and dishonour. 3. To the machinations of foes. 4. To utter destitution and ruin. III. THE MEANS OF PROMOTING SELF-CONTROL. 1. Habitual efforts of the will. 2. Avoidance of temptation. 3. Prayerful dependence on God's Spirit. 4. A serious and thoughtful habit of mind. IV. REASONS AND ENCOURAGEMENTS. 1. Self-control is an essential part of our salvation. 2. The example of God's forbearance. 3. The example of Christ's meekness. 4. Its connection with our usefulness. 5. Self-control gives real increase of power. V. APPLICATIONS. 1. To the Christians in their family and friendly intercourse. 2. To Christians in Church deliberation and action. 3. To Christians in secular business and general intercourse with the world. In conclusion, distinguish between self-control and apathy; and show its consistency with being zealously affected in a good cause. (*The Congregational Pulpit.*)

CHAPTER XXVI.

VERS. 1-8. *As snow in summer, and as rain in harvest, so honour is not seemly for a fool.*—*Honour paid to the wicked unseemly and pernicious*:—The respect which man pays his fellow is often grounded on reasons immoral and absurd. Sometimes man is respected on the ground of his personal appearance, sometimes on the ground of his mental abilities, sometimes on the ground of his worldly possessions, sometimes on the ground of his lineage and social position; but respect for men on any of these grounds alone is very questionable in morality. The true and Divinely authorised ground of respect for man is moral goodness. The man who is morally good, however deficient in other things, has a Divine claim to our honour. I. HONOUR PAID TO THE WICKED IS UNSEEMLY. It is like "snow in summer and rain in harvest." It is unseasonable and incongruous. How unseemly nature would appear in August with snow mantling our cornfields! Souls are morally constituted to reverence the good; to abhor the morally bad, wherever it is seen, whether in connection with lordly possessions, kingly power, or, what is higher still, mental genius. II. HONOUR PAID TO THE WICKED IS PERNICIOUS. "Snow in summer and rain in harvest" are in nature mischievous elements. Their tendency is to rob the agriculturist of the rewards of his labour, and to bring on a famine in the land. Far more mischievous is it when the people of a country sink so morally low as to render honour to men who are destitute of moral good-

ness. The perniciousness is also expressed by another figure in the text, "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." The word translated "sling" means a heap of stones, and the word "stone" a precious stone. Hence the margin reads, "As he that putteth a precious stone in an heap of stones, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." The idea evidently is, as a precious stone amongst rubbish, so is honour given to a fool. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. As the bird by wandering, as the swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come.—*Human anathemas*:—Another, and perhaps a better, translation is this, "Unsteady as the sparrow, as the flight of the swallow, is a causeless curse; it cometh not to pass." "There is a difficulty here," says Wardlaw, "in settling the precise point in the comparison. The ordinary interpretation explains it with reference to curses pronounced by men without cause—imprecations, anathemas, that are unmerited—and the meaning is understood to be—as the bird or sparrow, by wandering, and as the swallow, or wood-pigeon, by flying, shall not come—that is, shall not reach us or come upon us in the way of injury—so is it with the causeless curse. It will "do no more harm than the bird that flies overhead, than Goliath's curses on David." And it might be added that, as these birds return to their own place, to the nests whence they came, so will such gratuitous maledictions come back upon the persons by whom they are uttered. I. MEN ARE FREQUENTLY THE VICTIMS OF HUMAN IMPRECATIONS. Few men pass through the world without creating enemies, either intentionally or otherwise. Men vent their hatred in various ways. II. THAT HUMAN IMPRECATIONS ARE SOMETIMES UNDESERVED. The curse is "causeless." Sometimes the curses of men are deserved. There are two classes of causeless curses—1. Those that are hurled at us because we have done the right thing. When you are cursed for reproving evil, for proclaiming an unpopular truth, or pursuing a righteous course which clashes with men's prejudices or interests, the curse is causeless. 2. Those that are uttered without reason or feeling. There are men who are so in the habit of using profane language that it almost flows from their lips without malice or meaning. The greatest men in history have been cursed, and some of them have died under a copious shower of human imprecations. III. UNDESERVED IMPRECATIONS ARE ALWAYS HARMLESS. "The greatest curse causeless shall not come." Was David the worse for Shimei's curse? or Jeremiah for the curse of his persecutors? "He that is cursed without a cause," says Matthew Henry, "whether by furious imprecations or solemn anathemas, the curse will do him no more harm than the sparrow that flies over his head. It will fly away like the sparrow or the wild swallow, which go nobody knows where, until they return to their proper place, as the curse will at length return to him that uttered it." "Cursing," says Shakespeare, "ne'er hurts him, nor profits you a jot. Forbear it, therefore,—give your cause to heaven." But if the curse be not causeless, it will come. Jotham's righteous curse came upon Abimelech and the men of Shechem (*Judg. ix. 56, 57*). Elisha's curse fearfully came to the young mockers of Bethel (*2 Kings ii. 24*). "The curse abides on Jericho from generation to generation." (*Homilist.*)

Vers. 3-11. A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.—*Aspects of a fool*:—Sin is folly. It sacrifices the spiritual for the material, the temporal for the eternal, the pure joys of immortality for the gratification of an hour. I. HE APPEARS HERE AS A SERVANT. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." This proverb inverts our ideas. We should have said, "A bridle for the horse," and "a whip for the ass." But the Eastern asses have much of the fire of our blood horses, while the horses are often heavy and dull. Therefore the ass there requires the bridle, and the horse the whip—the one to accelerate, the other to restrain and guide activity. As the horse and the ass, in order to be used as the servants of man, require the application of force, so does the fool. "A rod for the fool's back." If a stubborn sinner is to be made the servant of society, coercion must be employed. Argument, persuasion, example; these moral appliances will affect him but little. II. HE APPEARS HERE AS A DEBATER. "Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit." There is an apparent contradiction here, but it is only apparent. The negative means, we are not to debate with him in his style and spirit, and thus become like him. We are not to descend to his level of speech and temper. The positive means, that we are to answer him as his folly deserves. It may be by

silence as well as speech. The fool talks; he is often a great debater. III. HE APPEARS HERE AS A MESSENGER. The meaning of this is, "He who would trust a fool with a message might as well cut off his feet, for he will have vexation and maybe damage." How careful should we be to entrust important business to trustworthy persons! Solomon himself drank damage, by employing an "industrious" servant, but a fool in wickedness, who "lifted up his hand against the king," and spoiled his son of ten parts of his kingdom (1 Kings xi. 26-40). Benhadad drank damage by sending a message by the hands of Hazael, who murdered his master when the way was opened for his own selfish purposes (2 Kings viii. 8-15). Much of the business of life is carried on by messengers or agents. How much a mercantile firm suffers by improper representatives! IV. HE APPEARS HERE AS A TEACHER. "The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." It is not very uncommon to find fools sustaining the office and performing the functions of teachers. "They have a parable in their mouth." The verses suggest two things concerning them as teachers—1. That they appear very ridiculous. "The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the hands of fools." The idea seems to be, as the cripple who desires to appear nimble and agile appears ridiculous in his lame efforts to walk, so the fool appears ridiculous in his efforts to teach. 2. As teachers, they are generally very mischievous. "As a thorn goeth up into the hand of the drunkard, so is a parable in the mouth of fools." The idea is, that a fool handling the doctrines of wisdom is like a drunken man handling thorns. The besotted inebriate, not knowing what he is about, lays hold of the thorn and perforates his own nerves. The wise sayings in the mouth of a stupid man are self-condemnatory. V. HE APPEARS HERE AS A COMMISSIONER. "The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool and rewardeth transgressors." The word "God" is not in the original. The margin is the more faithful translation—"A great man giveth all, and he hireth the fool; he hireth also transgressors." The idea seems to be, that when worldly princes employ fools for the public service it is a source of anxiety and trouble to all good citizens. "The lesson has application from the throne downwards, through all the descriptions of subsidiary trusts. Extensive proprietors, who employ overseers of their tenants, or of those engaged in their manufactories, or mines, or whatever else be the description of their property, should see to the character of these overseers. Their power may be abused, and multitudes of workmen suffer, when the owner—the master—knows nothing of what is going on. But he ought to know. Many complainings and strikes, well or ill-founded, have their origin here." VI. HE APPEARS HERE AS A REPROBATE. The emblem here is disgusting, but the thing signified is infinitely more so. Peter quotes this proverb (2 Pet. ii. 20-22). The wicked man often sickens at his wickedness, and then returns to it again. Thus Pharaoh returned from his momentary conviction (Exod. viii. 8-15); Ahab from his pretended repentance (1 Kings xxi.); Herod from his partial amendment (Mark vi. 20-27). (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Vers. 4, 5. Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.—*Answering a fool according to his folly*:—The ambiguity in these verses lies in the connecting words "according to," which are here used in two different senses. "Answer not a fool according to," i.e., not in a manner agreeing with his folly, lest thou become as foolish and perverse as he. "Answer him according to," i.e., according to the nature and desert of his folly; so as best to meet and refute it. (E. Pond, D.D.) *The treatment of a fool*:—There are many cases in which a fool is to be heard, and not answered at all. When a scorner reviles us, it is needless to reprove him for it. Our Lord often kept silence when impertinent questions were asked Him. But silence cannot be the rule in every case. In many cases it is proper that a fool's words should be answered, only you must take care in answering not to imitate him. If he speaks unreasonable, profane, peevish, or passionate words, you must not answer him in his own style. You are angry at him for his folly, and reprove him for the extravagance of his behaviour, and therefore you cannot but confess that yourselves are worthy of a very sharp reproof, if you behave like him at the very time that you are testifying your displeasure at his conduct. It becomes not the followers of Jesus to return railing for railing, or one angry reflection for another, but in whatever manner others talk, our tongues ought still to be governed by the law of meekness and charity. (George Lawson, D.D.) *The scorner answered*:—A certain preacher had wrought his best to benefit his audience; but one of them came to him, and somewhat

rudely remarked, "Your preaching is of no use to me. I do not believe that I have a soul; I don't want to be talked to about an imaginary hereafter. I shall die like a dog." The minister calmly replied, "Sir, I have evidently failed through misapprehension. I did my best for the good of all my hearers; but I prepared the entertainment under the notion that I was catering for men with souls. Had I known there were creatures present who had no souls, and would die like dogs, I would have provided a good supply of bones for them." (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *Reply to scoffers*:—It is stated by one of the biographers of John Wesley that while he was staying at an hotel at Oxford for a few hours, some wild young men, who were aware of the fact, took occasion to play a joke upon him. Coming suddenly into the room where he was sitting, they exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Wesley, the devil's dead!" The aged saint arose, and placing his hands upon the heads of two of the young men, he said, with a voice full of pity, "My poor fatherless children, what will you do?"

Ver. 8. **As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so is he that giveth honour to a fool.**—*Throwing a stone at an idol*:—The words should be translated, as Colonel Conder was the first to point out: "As he that throweth a stone at an idol, so is he that giveth honour to a fool." The comparison refers to the universal custom, in ancient times, among Pagan nations of throwing a stone at an idolatrous shrine, not in execration of it, like the stones thrown to this day by the Jews at Absalom's pillar at Jerusalem, but in honour of it. At the foot of some sacred tree, or some pillar consecrated to idolatrous worship, a cairn or heap of stones is generally found; each stone testifying of a visit paid to the spot by some votary; and the larger the heap the greater the veneration shown. In Greece, the worship of Hermes or Mercury consisted in throwing a stone at his image, set up as a mark by the wayside to protect travellers on a journey. In Palestine, amongst the primitive Canaanite inhabitants that still survived, idolatry was widely practised; and in early times it was a common sight, on rising spots among the hills of Judea and Galilee, to come upon a menhir, or dolmen, in which the object of worship was a rude stone image, forming the nucleus of a cairn or heap of stones which had gradually grown around it, in remembrance of the visits paid by worshippers. In Scotland many cairns are made of the stones thrown at a rude stone monument, or cromlech, as an act of worship; and, perhaps, many of the cairns of remembrance raised to the dead may have originated from this act of worship. The old saying, "I will add a stone to your cairn," was the highest expression of reverence and regard that could be offered to a friend. With this explanation the comparison used in the Scripture proverb becomes plain and forcible. The proverb could only have been used by an iconoclast; and very probably came into existence in the days of Hezekiah, after the wholesale destruction, by this pious and zealous monarch, of the altars and stone monuments of the Canaanite idolaters which had corrupted Israel. Hezekiah was bent on the work of national reformation, and the purification and consecration of the temple by a perfect ceremonial was accompanied by the overthrow of all the "high places" and the idolatrous images and rites connected with them, as antagonistic to the holiness of the land as God's heritage. And, therefore, the proverb of the text would have a deep force and meaning in his day. Like one who continued the old practice of throwing a stone at an idolatrous monument, in token of worship, a practice now forbidden and proved to be vain and useless, so was he who gave honour to a fool. A fool was as unworthy of honour as an idol is of worship. In the one case there is no reason for the honour; and in the other case the worship is a mere empty foolish superstition. An idol is nothing, and a fool is a negation. (*H. Macmillan, D.D.*)

Ver. 11. **As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.**—*The accustomed course resumed*:—Dost thou ever raise thy little dam across the streamlet, and think to dry the bed below? Hast thou accomplished thy work, and stood watching awhile thy success? Hast thou seen the water above deepen and widen, and gather strength, and at length, impatient of restraint, push through thy yielding barrier, and resume its accustomed course? But couldst thou have turned the stream into another channel thou hadst triumphed, and the former bed had been left dry. So thou hast attempted, perhaps, to confine thy sinful will by the barrier of good resolutions. Thou hast seemed for awhile to gain thy point, and sin was at a stand. Alas! thou hast found that it but gained force by restraint; ere awhile the inclination has burst through all thy well-formed

resolves, and hath rushed more impetuously than ever to the forbidden object. No; the will and affections must be turned into another course—towards God and heaven, and things spiritual; and then shall they cease to flow through the tempting vanities of this evil world. "This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal. v. 16.) (*H. G. Salter.*)

Ver. 12. Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.—*The folly of self-conceit*.—The Scriptures are full of denunciations against the self-sufficiency of man. The writings of Solomon are conspicuous for expressions which stigmatise the absurdity and the guilt of a self-willed, self-sufficient spirit. Here he says that when a man is wise in his own conceit, there is so little hope of his reformation that even a fool would be a more promising subject for moral and intellectual discipline. Teachable and honest mediocrity is always attended with a fair hope of improvement. But that very quality which may preserve, even to dulness itself, the chance of amelioration, is necessarily wanting to him who is wise in his own conceit, namely, a tractable and docile temper. Whenever a feeling of self-sufficiency takes possession of a mind, even of more than ordinary strength, there is danger of its shutting out all prospect of effectual improvement. What exertions will be made by one who is content with his acquisitions? To him who knows better than the rest of mankind, instruction or advice must needs appear impertinent. This guilty and miserable habit locks up from the use of all who are under its dominion those riches without which the fairest intellect must ever remain poor indeed—the wisdom of other ages, and the resources and experiences of other minds. It is dismal to reflect on the number of characters which have been ruined by this unhappy delusion. When once this fatal sorcery has suspended in the mind all aspirations after higher attainments, from that moment the movement of the character becomes infallibly retrograde. By the known constitution of things it is impossible that the intellectual or moral powers can be for a moment stationary. There is, in man's faculties, a constant tendency towards relapse and decay, which must be encountered by perpetual exertion. It is a sadder condition when the two characters in the text happen to coincide; when imbecility and arrogance go together; when the fool is wise in his own conceit. The language of the text applies to cases of great excess. But all cases have a tendency towards excess, and caution is useful in the earliest stages. The predominance of self-conceit is in most instances the result of negligent or injudicious culture. Self-will enters largely into the composition of every human character. It shows itself with the earliest dawn of the faculties. There is no instinctive impulse which prompts a child to the salutary but painful exercise of exploring his own insufficiency. The feeling of self-sufficiency is strengthened by the habit of comparing ourselves with low and imperfect characters, and by fixing ourselves in the centre of a very contracted circle. The mind should be elevated by the contemplation of the noblest forms of excellence, both intellectual and moral. Christianity is irreconcilably at war with every vice or infirmity which belongs to the family of pride. (*C. W. Le Bas, M.A.*) *Description and danger of religious self-conceit*.—Nothing renders a man so unmanageable, in the common concerns of life as self-conceit. But show the application of this passage in a spiritual sense. I. EXPLAIN THE STATEMENT OF THE TEXT. Wisdom in this book is another name for religion. Foolishness is irreligion. Then the man who is "wise in his own conceit" is religious in his own conceits. All men are naturally subject to pride and vanity. A supposed superiority in religion will furnish ground for the exercise of this disposition as readily as any other fancied distinction. A man may be vain of his religion. Such persons very possibly have knowledge, and feeling, and what they call religious attainments. But they are destitute of self-knowledge: they have no real humiliation of heart, and they are greatly wanting in charity as to their judgment of the religious state and character of others. They have no notion of rendering to God a spiritual service. There is more hope of a fool, an irreligious person, than of such an one. II. SHOW THE GROUNDS AND REASONS OF THE TEXT. Such persons as described totally mistake the nature of true religion. To be religious is to be spiritually-minded. To advance in religion is to grow in grace. They pervert the very design and end of religion. It is designed to make men humble; it makes these persons proud. They have closed up the door to their own improvement. Use this subject for self-examination. By it try our own religion, and see what is our own spiritual state. (*E. Cooper.*)

Ver. 13. *The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets.—A lion in the way:*—The reprehensible sloth of the coward does not appear in what he says, but in what he leaves unsaid. He means, but is ashamed to say, "Because there is a lion in the way, I will shirk my duty." The brave man says, "Though a lion is in the way, I will slay it; anyway I will fight with it and wound it." 1. "There is a lion in the way." In what way? In the way of life—of every life. Life, if it is to be a true life, is not an easy thing. There is, indeed, such a thing as a life which is no true life, only a living death. Sloth, self-indulgence, self-abandonment to a besetting sin, caring for nothing but self, and the keeping one's self miserably alive, to live at ease, to live selfishly, to live for pleasure, all this is to be dead while we live. If you live thus you may for a time live at home quite secure, fearless of the only lions you dread. If, on the other hand, you mean to live for nobler objects than those of shameless selfishness, you too, like Saul, will have to fight with wild beasts at Ephesus or elsewhere. There will be needed the girded loin and the burning lamp, the swift foot, and the sharp sword, and the stout heart, and the strong arm; faith and prayer, and the battle, and the Cross. 2. There are many lions, and not one only. True courage does not consist in the absence of any sense of fear—that may only be due to brute apathy—but it is to feel fear and to overcome it. I. FOR THE BRAVE, TRUE MAN THERE IS THE LION OF THE WORLD. We live in days of wonderful, and for some men, pleasant compromises. Religion walks in silver slippers. Good and evil lie flat together, side by side, in amiable neutrality. You may take your choice. If what you are content with is compromise and conventionality, and the broad beaten road, and success and popularity, you may have it for the asking: it is quite easy to offend nobody. But if you would have any of the nobleness, any of the usefulness, of the prophet or the reformer, boldly rebuke vice, denounce a fashionable iniquity, fling away from you a theological falsehood, run counter to a general delusion, deal vigorously with the "lion in the way." The lion of the world's hatred and opposition may be avoided. It is avoided by thousands of sleek and prosperous men. II. But there is another lion which each man must meet, THE LION OF HIS OWN FLESHLY NATURE, OF HIS OWN PHYSICAL AND MENTAL PASSIONS. Plato describes each man as consisting, so to speak, of three beings in one: a lion, a many-headed monster, and a man. Of these the man represents the controlling reason; the lion the fierce and irascible temper; the many-headed monster the low and animal passions. The man, the reason, must absolutely rule; the irascible impulses must not be crushed, indeed, but controlled; the monster of fleshly lusts must be utterly subdued. By every one of us that lion, that multitudinous and many-headed monster, must be fought. III. ANOTHER LION IS HE WHO "GOETH ABOUT, SEEKING WHOM HE MAY DEVOUR." Each of us knows by experience that there are some tendencies and temptations—to pride, to falsity, to blaspheming thoughts, to causeless hatred—which often come upon a man with fierce and unlooked-for suddenness, and we know not whence or where the tempting opportunity suddenly meets the susceptible disposition. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Remember that he can be fought face to face, but the Christian has no armour for the back. IV. CONSIDER THE DUTY OF FACING THESE LIONS IN OUR OUTWARD LIFE. Everywhere individual license invades public rights. The slothful man (and the slothful man is the epitome of the slothful nation) is ingenious in excuses. Happily every now and then God-strengthened, God-inspired, good, brave, unsophisticated men, have torn their way through these thorny hedges of indolence, greed, and opposition; have faced the wild beast of demoralised public opinion, in spite of its erect mane and flaming eye. V. THE SLOTHFUL MAN PLEADS THAT MANY HAVE BEEN SLAIN BY THIS "LION IN THE WAY." Yes, it is quite true. But to them, as to their Lord, through death, and after death, if not in life, hath come the glory and the victory. Slain: yet no harm has come to them. Better a thousand times their death than the life of the selfish and the base. There is one way in which a man can die even better than this. It is when, homeless, landless, wifeless, childless, without even a hope of earthly things, he faces those fearful odds, not for his own wealth or his own comfort, but for his brother man; faces them for the sake of simple duty, faces them for the common love of humanity, faces them because, if God wills it, he, too, is ready to die for those for whom Christ died. Take courage, then, all ye who are fearless enough and noble enough to care for any righteous cause. (Dean Farrar.) *The slothful man:*—Man is made up of contradictions. A strong propensity to indolence, and a principle which prompts to action. There is a charm in the exercise

of those physical and intellectual powers with which man is endowed. With many indolence diffuses its benumbing influence through all their faculties and powers. It becomes a disease, which strengthens itself by continuance. Habit is equally efficient in generating and confirming evil and good qualities. Extraordinary changes of moral character from bad to good have occurred in every age; but we have no right to calculate on them, so as to become indifferent to the ordinary growth of good or evil disposition. Indolence of character proceeds from a torpid state of the affections, or coldness of heart, in some partly natural, in most persons however, acquired by habit. In the state of indolence, the spellbound slumberer avails himself of every pretext for continuing to doze. The text gives one of his frivolous and groundless excuses. Consider some of the sluggard's formidable discouragements and obstacles in the way of exertion—such as that labour is painful; that self-denial is against nature; and that there is no certain prospect of success, and that God, being all mercy, is ready to forgive at any time. You cannot question or dispute the evils, the misery and ruin to which indolence leads in this world; or the moral ruin to which the sin of lukewarmness, or indifference to your religious obligations, will lead you in the world to come. (*James Flint, D.D.*) *Seeing with our prejudices* :—We see not so much with our eyes as with our prejudices. "The wish is father to the thought." Some men look at the religious life, and see in it nothing but what is narrow and bigoted, gloomy and morose. They do not want to see anything else. Some professing Christians look on the world's amusements and discern no evil in them. It is to be feared they have no special desire to be convinced of any. There are members of Churches who look at Christian work in its varied departments and with its paramount claims, yet cannot be brought to discover their own qualifications to engage in it. The reason is, they have no wish to. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the streets." And when anything in the shape of self-denying service is proposed to certain persons, this lion assumes most portentous dimensions, and rivals the thunder with his roar. (*J. Halsey.*)

Vers. 17-22. **He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife.**—*Mischievous citizens* :—I. **THE MEDDLER** (ver. 17). 1. His conduct defined. 2. His mischief indicated. Renders himself liable to the anger of one, if not both, of the contending parties. II. **THE LIAR** (vers. 18, 19). 1. By his false representations he involves his neighbour in some embarrassment, contention, or pain, and then excuses himself by saying, "It is in sport." A lie is no less a lie because spoken in the spirit of frolic and jest. 2. Many a practical jester does the maniac's mischief without the maniac's excuse. III. **THE QUERULOUS** (ver. 21). He is a social incendiary. IV. **THE TALEBEARER** (ver. 22). 1. He maintains strife. As the microscopic sting of a little insect sometimes poisons the blood and influences the body of a strong man, the mere whisper of a talebearer will kindle the fire of discord in a whole community. 2. He infects with poison; his words destroy the mental peace of him to whom they are uttered, the reputation of him of whom they are uttered, and the social happiness of both. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 23. **Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross.**—*Putrefaction phosphorescent* :—The illuminating power of phosphorus appears due to an extremely slow chemical reaction, and it is affirmed that vegetable and animal substances may grow phosphorescent at a certain stage of decomposition, or even without any appearance of putrefaction. Accredited authorities cite a host of examples of fresh or stale meats which have been seen to shine during the night with a more or less vivid clearness. Fish, and especially salt-water fish, when no longer fresh, acquire a phosphorescence which brightens during the first period of putrefaction. Leave for two or three days dead salt-water fish in non-luminous sea-water; at the end of that time the water will be covered with a thin pellicle of fatty matter, and will soon become phosphorescent. But it is not only in material nature that we thus find brightness in combination with impurity. Genius itself has been found shining amidst moral putrefaction. (*Scientific Illustrations.*) *A wicked heart disguising itself* :—This may be meant either—1. Of a wicked heart showing itself in burning lips, furious, passionate, outrageous words, burning in malice, and presenting those to whom, or of whom, they are spoken. Ill-words and ill-will agree together as well as a potsherd and the dross of silver, which, now that the pot is broken, and the dross separated from the silver, are fit to be thrown together to the dunghill. 2. Or of a wicked heart

disguising itself, with burning lips, burning with the professions of love and friendship, and even persecuting a man with flatteries; this is like a potsherd covered with the scum or dross of silver, with which one that is weak may be imposed upon, as if it were of some value, but a wise man is soon aware of the cheat. This sense agrees with the following verses. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Vers. 24-27. He that hateth dissembleth with his lips.—Clandestine hatred:—
I. It is often greatly **DISGUISED**. "Burning lips and a wicked heart are like a potsherd covered with silver dross. **II.** It is **EXCESSIVELY CORRUPT**. "When he speaketh fair, believe him not: for there are seven abominations in his heart." The word number "seven," in Scripture, denotes "fulness" or "completeness." The idea here is, that such a man's heart is full of abominations. **III.** It is **LIABLE TO EXPOSURE**. "Whose hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness shall be shewed before the whole congregation." Dissembling never answers in the end. The Providence of God brings dark deeds to light. All sin will one day be stripped of its mask, and laid bare in all its putrescent hideousness to the open eye of the universe. **IV.** It is **SELF-RUINOUS**. "Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein." Evil is a hard worker. It digs pits and rolls stones. And what is worse, all its hard work is self-ruinous. Into the pit which they have dug they shall tumble. Those who plot mischief for others will be overwhelmed with it themselves. Moab, in attempting to curse Israel, fell himself under the curse of God. Haman's gallows for Mordecai was his own "promotion of shame." The enemies of Daniel were devoured in the ruin which they plotted against him. Thus does God "take the wise in his craftiness, the wicked in his wickedness." The malice that meditates the evil is often the cause of its own overthrow. **V.** It is **SOCIALLY PERNICIOUS**. "A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it; and a flattering mouth worketh ruin." 1. It injures by its slanders. "A lying tongue hateth those that are afflicted by it." 2. It injures by its flatteries. Flattery is a social curse. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *By injuring others we are ourselves often the greatest sufferers:—*The wasp's sting is provided with a barb, and when he feels particularly vicious, and drives the sting into the flesh, it becomes so firmly imbedded that the only way for him to escape is to leave the sting behind. This, however, is sure to cause his death. He receives himself such a wound that he cannot recover. We sometimes forget that when we hurt others by stinging words and treacherous acts, we ourselves, in the long run, are generally the greatest sufferers. (*W. Judson.*)

Ver. 28. A flattering mouth worketh ruin.—How may we best cure the love of being flattered?—**I. WHAT FLATTERY IS.** Solomon calls it "a mouth that flatters." All that comes from the flatterer is complaisant, only heartiness and sincerity are wanting. All that appears is "a fair semblance," but very falsehood. The actor in this tragedy never forgets himself and his own advantage, stripping the novice he hath coaxed, and living on him whom he deceived. There are two kinds of flattery: a self-flattery, and a flattery from others. As to the qualities of flattery, it may be hellish, revengeful, servile, cowardly, covetous, or envious. Love to be flattered is a disease of human nature. It is an immoderate desire of praise. When this desire prevails, we believe what the flatterer saith; set the value on ourselves by what such affirm of us. Another branch of love to be flattered is an affected seeking to ourselves, or giving unto others unnecessary occasions of setting forth the worth of our persons, actions, and qualifications, according to the standard of flatterers; a well-pleasedness to hear the great and good things by dissembling flatterers ascribed to us which either we never did, or did in manner much below what they report them. But—**II. LOVE OF UNDUE PRAISE IS PERNICIOUS.** It destroys virtuous principles, natural inclinations to good, estates, reputation, safety and life, the soul and its happiness. **III. WHAT MAY BEST EFFECT ITS CURE?** 1. Consider the bad name that flattery hath ever had. 2. View the deplorable miseries it hath filled the world with. 3. Suspect all who come to you with undue praise. 4. Reject the friendship of the man who turns due praises into flattery. 5. Look on flattery, and your love for it, as diametrically opposed to God in the truth of all His Word. 6. Cultivate generous and pure love to all that is good. 7. Get and keep the humble frame of heart. Undue love of the praise of men is sacrilegious robbery of God. (*Henry Hurst, M.A.*) *The flatterer:—*As to the flatterer, he is the most dangerous of characters. He attacks at points where men are naturally most successfully assailable; where they are most in

danger of being thrown off their guard and giving him admission. And when by his flatteries he has thus got the mastery, then follows the execution of the end for which they were employed—"worketh ruin." The expression is strong, but not stronger than experience justifies. It even works ruin to the most interesting characters—characters admired and worthy of the admiration—by infusing a principle that spoils the whole, the principle of vanity and self-conceit. They thus lose their loveliest and most engaging attraction. And whatever be the selfish object of the flatterer, his selfishness obtains its gratification by the ruin of him whom his flatteries have deceived. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Flattery worketh ruin*:—The stem of the ivy is furnished with root-like suckers which insinuate their spurs into the bark of trees or on the surface of a wall. Who has not seen with regret some noble ash-tree covered with ivy, in whose embrace it rapidly yields up its life? Surely the root is draining the tree of its sap, and transferring it to its own veins. Thus does a sycophant gradually extend his influence over a patron until the manliness of that patron succumbs to his ascendancy. The hero is ruined, and the flatterer flourishes in his place. Beware of the insinuating aptitudes of the parasite! Let him, like ivy on a wall, keep his proper situation. Protect a noble nature from his advances. (*Scientific Illustrations.*) *Flattery cannot compensate for the damage it works*:—Parasitic plants send their roots into the substance of another plant, and derive their food from its juices; but though, like some of the human kind, they live upon their neighbour's bounty, it must be admitted that they sometimes reward their benefactor by adorning it with their beautiful flowers. The *Rafflesia Arnoldi*, for example, whose flower is three feet across, and whose cup will contain several pints of fluid, grows attached to the stem of a climbing cistus in Sumatra. The mistletoe also, whose silvery berries adorn the oak. Whether these offerings of the parasite bear any reasonable proportion to the amount of damage done by it must be a question open to doubt. Certain it is that the offerings of the social parasite to his benefactor, consisting as they do of subservience, flattery, and petty traits, are no real benefit to anybody; whilst, on the other hand, the injury which the parasite does to honesty and manliness is most unmistakable. On the whole, we are inclined to think that all the productions of parasites, whether vegetable or human, are not sufficient to make us value the producers very highly. (*Ibid.*)

CHAPTER XXVII.

VER. 1. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.—*On the conduct to be held with regard to future events*:—It is needless to prove the change and mutability of our present state, or the fact that the changes cannot be foreseen by us. Obvious as they are, it would be well if the thoughts of men dwell on them more. But by a strange and prevailing deception, almost every one thinks his own case an exception from the general law; and that he may build plans with as much confidence on his present situation as if some assurance were given him that it were never to change. It has been so contrived by Providence that there should be no permanent stability to man's condition on earth. The seeds of alteration are everywhere sown. And think on what small and inconsiderable causes changes depend. In the midst of all these contingencies plans and designs for the future are every day formed. And this is fit and proper. Rules and precautions may be indicated. **I. BOAST NOT THYSELF OF TO-MORROW.** Never presume arrogantly on futurity. Beware of pride and vanity. In the day of prosperity rejoice with trembling. **II. DESPAIR NOT OF TO-MORROW.** Adverse situations fill many with fears and alarms of what is to come. The day may bring forth some unforeseen relief, and therefore we should hope under distress. The doctrine which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate is that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal, and a steady mind. Anxiety, when it seizes the heart, is a dangerous disease, productive both of much sin and much misery. **III. DELAY NOT TILL TO-MORROW WHAT IS PROPER TO BE DONE TO-DAY.** Thou art not the lord of to-morrow. Procrastination has, throughout every age, been the ruin of mankind. Many of the misfortunes which befall men in their

worldly concerns are a consequence of delay. To-morrow, being loaded with the concerns of to-day, in addition to its own, is clogged and embarrassed. Evils of the same kind, arising from the same cause, overtake men in their moral and spiritual interests. IV. BE EVERY DAY PREPARED FOR WHAT TO-MORROW MAY BRING FORTH. The best preparation for all the uncertainties of futurity consists in a well-ordered mind, a good conscience, and a cheerful submission to the will of heaven. If to-morrow bring you any unexpected good, prepare to receive it with gratitude, temperance, and modesty. If it shall bring forth evil, prepare to receive it with manly fortitude. V. BUILD YOUR HOPES OF HAPPINESS ON SOMEWHAT MORE SOLID AND LASTING THAN WHAT EITHER TO-DAY OR TO-MORROW ARE LIKELY TO PRODUCE. He who rests wholly upon this world builds his house upon the sand. We are begotten again unto a "lively hope." Here is the object to which a wise man will bend his chief attention, that, having acted his part on earth with fidelity and honour, he may be enabled, through the merits of his Saviour, to look for a place in the mansions of eternal and untroubled peace. This prospect is the great corrective of the present vanity of human life. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *Boasting*.—Man's nature inclines to boasting, to glorifying in something, and this ariseth from some apprehended excellency or advantage, and so is originated in the understanding power of man. There is a glorying and boasting which is good, especially a boasting in God. It is the apprehended personal interest in a thing which makes it become a subject of boasting. Nothing is truly the soul's own but that which survives all changes, and is inseparable from it. There may be a lawful glorying in the works of God. Oftentimes men are found glorying in that which is their shame. The object of degenerate and vicious boasting is presented in this text. "Boast not thyself," or of thyself. Self is the centre of man's affections and motions. This is the great "Diana" that the heart worships. Men's affections part themselves into three great heads of created things. 1. The goods or perfections of the mind. 2. The goods or advantages of the body. 3. The things that are without us, *bona fortuna*, riches and honour. There is also a strong inclination in man towards the time to come; he has an immortal appetite. If the soul of man were in the primitive integrity, this providence of the soul would reach to eternity, which is the only just measure of the endurance of any immortal spirit. But since man's understanding is darkened, he can see nothing further than "to-morrow." But confidence in to-morrow is folly, because of the instability of all outward things, and because of our ignorance of future events. Of all boastings the most irrational and groundless is that which arises from presumption of future things, which are so uncertain both in themselves and to us. Self is the great and ultimate object of man's glorying. No man's present possession satisfies him, without the addition of hope and expectation for the future. Our present revenue will not content the heart. Therefore the soul, as it were, anticipates and forestalls the morrow. But consider—1. How independent all things are of us and of our choice. 2. The inconstancy of all material things. There is nothing certain but that all things are uncertain. 3. Our ignorance concerning coming changes. All things proclaim the folly and madness of that which the heart of man is set upon. "The counsel of the Lord," that alone shall "stand." (*H. Binning.*) *The necessity of a present repentance*.—It is not the doctrine of repentance men scruple to acknowledge, but the time for doing it. They say, "To-morrow will be time enough." And they say this, again and again, through all the stages of life. Press on attention the absolute necessity of our present performance of this great work of repentance. I. SHOW THIS BY THE DANGEROUS UNCERTAINTIES WHICH ALL DELAYING MEN HAVE TO DEPEND UPON. There is no such thing hinted at in Scripture as future repentance. There is no ground for hoping that a late repentance will avail men who knowingly and wilfully defer that repentance which is the duty of the present. 1. What certainty can there be in that which depends upon so uncertain a foundation as the life of man? Who can ensure a hereafter to repent in? 2. As life is uncertain, so is the continuance of God's grace uncertain also. II. HOW IMPROPER THE TIMES RESOLVED ON BY SUCH MEN TO REPENT IN WILL BE FOR THE WORK OF THEIR REPENTANCE. Such as the time of sickness, or of old age, or of death. III. EVERY EXCUSE WHICH MEN MAY MAKE IN FAVOUR OF THEIR DELAYS MUST, IF SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED, OBLIGE THEM TO HASTEN THEIR REPENTANCE. 1. Excuse—their sins are so small; they can be easily cast off at pleasure. 2. Sins are so great; it is too difficult to repent. 3. Life is just now too full of other things. Consider that every moment consumes somewhat of the thread of life; and that of all business and employments none can

possibly be more requisite than our making our peace with God. (*William Bramston.*) *To-morrow* :—Some are hindered by doubts, or blinded by definite unbelief; others are repelled from the gospel by prejudices of early education; others by worldly influences, others by the love of sin; and some by a coward fear of the possible consequences of decision. The chief hindrance, however, is the habit of procrastination. The fault is a common one even in worldly matters. There are things that must be done at once, and things which may be left. These latter have a very good chance of never being done at all. There are few who have not a lurking intention of thinking about religious matters sooner or later. Many are indisposed to prompt action, because they fear religion may interfere with their manner of life, their commercial prosperity, and their social enjoyments. By and by, when other matters are not so urgent, they may find a convenient season. This habit of procrastination grows upon us until it becomes a sort of second nature, and at last, even should we wish to act promptly, we seem almost to have lost the power. For one who doubts the Bible, there are a hundred who simply put off for the present. The Holy Ghost says, "To-day"; they still say, "To-morrow." How can we best counteract this disposition towards procrastination? The nominally Christian world is pervaded by the radically false notion that religion has mainly to do with the future rather than with the present. This notion is encouraged by the use of the word "salvation." Men do not see that they need to be saved now. True religion is a matter of present urgency. Religion is the one secret of true enjoyment in life. Another cause of procrastination is a false idea of the relative importance of things temporal and things spiritual. Religion is regarded as distinct from the practical purposes of life. This is an inverted estimate of the relative importance of things. Why should we say to-day rather than to-morrow? Because, of all our life, only to-day is really ours. To-morrow belongs to God. Every to-morrow that God allots you, when it gets to you is a to-day. The to-morrow that we think will do so much for us never comes. To-day may ensure our best interests; to-morrow they may have passed from us, and be forfeited for ever. Moreover, we have a great work to do, and only a limited time to do it in. And we are living in a perishing world, and men and women are dying unprepared every day that passes. By religious decision, how much happiness we may confer upon others by our personal example and influence. In this world of changes and uncertainties, no man can be sure that he will have any to-morrow. Think, too, how you are treating your Lord when, from day to day, you still continue to say, "To-morrow." To-day again He proffers the unspeakable gift. His time is now. Another to-morrow, and He may be constrained reluctantly to depart, wearied out at last by your heartless indifference. Oh, take shame to yourself that, hitherto, He has had nothing from you but "to-morrow." (*W. H. Hay Aiken, M.A.*) *The folly and danger of boasting of the morrow* :—No truth is more obvious than that of the instability of human life, and the uncertainty of all earthly things; and yet there is none which produces a less abiding impression on the mind, or a less practical effect on the conduct. It seems to be a truth so trite as to be beneath our notice. All our courses of action, all our habits of thought, imply that we have a longer continuance, and a firmer interest, in the things around us, than a full conviction of their vanity and their uncertainty appear to warrant. We are willing to allow, as a general rule, that all below is fleeting and uncertain, but in our own case we are anxious to find a fortunate exception. This, at least, lies in the bottom of our hearts, springing up indistinctly in our thoughts, and whispering peace and safety, where neither of them are discoverable by the eye of reason. A knowledge of the fate of others can never entirely remove this error, because it is deeply seated in the heart. By boasting of to-morrow is meant a confident expectation of its arrival, and an undoubting calculation of the enjoyments which it may be expected to bring along with it; such a fancied assurance of possessing it, as may lead us to defer what ought now to be done till that imaginary period. The greatest evil to which this leads is the postponement of a religious life to some future period of our existence. It is too common for man to look upon religion as something totally incompatible with the pursuits and enjoyments of the present world. He therefore relies upon the possibility that the morrow may be extended to him, and to that uncertain period he commits the serious task of shaking off the evil habits which he has contracted, and curbing the corrupt passions which he has hitherto indulged, and of cultivating the Christian graces. Too often in the short and anxious hour of our closing existence all the more serious work of life has to be done. Let it be our

aim, then, to look upon religion, not as a task which we are commanded to perform, but as a privilege which we are invited to share. For most of the ills of life religion is an effectual remedy, and in all it is a cheering alleviation. 1. There are many miseries which the morrow is continually bringing forth, that are the direct consequence of our own imprudent conduct or our own vicious habits. They spring from a want of religion; and the possession of it would of course relieve them. 2. Suffering also belongs to us as the sons of mortality; such as pain, sickness, infirmity, age. Religion cannot altogether remove such woes, but it can very materially mitigate and relieve them. And, at least, it enables us to look rightly upon them. 3. There is a class of disappointments to which irreligious men are subject, but from which the true Christian is altogether free. The worldly man is entirely immersed in the things of this life, its pleasures and its cares. When the changeful morrow comes, and these are swept away, he is ruined. The happiness of the religious man is not dependent on such accidents as these. (*R. Parkinson, B.D.*)

To-morrow:—I. THE ABUSE OF TO-MORROW. "Boast not"—1. Because it is extremely foolish to boast at all. Boasting never makes a man any the greater in the esteem of others, nor does it improve the real estate either of his body or his soul. Morrows come from God; thou hast no right to glory in them. 2. Because to-morrow is one of the frailest things in creation, and therefore the least to be boasted of. Boast not of to-morrow—thou hast it not. Boast not of to-morrow—thou mayest never have it. Boast not of to-morrow—if thou hadst it, it would deceive thee. Boast not of to-morrow, for to-morrow thou mayest be where morrows will be dreadful things, to tremble at. 3. Because it is exceedingly hurtful to boast. It is hurtful now. Some men are led into extraordinary extravagance from their hopes of the future. It is hurtful to-morrow also. Because you will be disappointed with to-morrow if you boast about it before it comes. The over-confident not only entail great sorrow upon themselves but upon others also. II. THE ABUSE OF THE SPIRITUAL TO-MORROW. Never boast of to-morrow with regard to your soul's salvation. Those do who think it will be easier for them to repent to-morrow than it is to-day. Those do who suppose they shall have plenty of time to repent and return to God. Those do who boast in a way of resolves to do better. III. IF TO-MORROWS ARE NOT TO BE BOASTED OF, ARE THEY GOOD FOR NOTHING? Nay; we may look forward to them with confidence and joy, and we may seek in wise ways to provide for to-morrow. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

The folly and danger of delays in religion:—I. MEN ARE NATURALLY INCLINED TO BOAST OF SOMETHING. II. MEN ARE APT TO DELAY RELIGION AS LONG AS THEY CAN. They boast of to-morrow. III. IT IS BASE AND SINFUL TO PUT OFF THE CONCERNS OF RELIGION TILL TO-MORROW. IV. GOD ALONE KNOWS WHAT IS TO COME. The Jews of Christ's time were dreaming of future prosperity, but He foresaw their ruin and destruction as at hand. We, like them, lay plans for futurity, and invade the province of the Most High. We perhaps anticipate wealth, honour. V. GREAT CHANGES HAPPEN IN A SHORT TIME. "For thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." Since the introduction of sin, the creature at its best estate is altogether vanity. (*Christian Recorder.*)

The danger of trusting to the future:—I. In this passage it is very plainly insinuated THAT WE ARE TOO APT TO BOAST OF TO-MORROW. The young hope to live to old age; the middle-aged, having passed the most critical stages of infancy and childhood, reckon, with too much security, on grey hairs; while the old look around them for examples, a few of which they can glean of extreme age, and hope they themselves shall add to the number of extraordinary cases of longevity. Boasting of to-morrow likewise appears in framing worldly schemes of future ease and aggrandisement. He who proposes it as his object to make up a sum at all hazards, that he may, by a certain time, execute a plan of a great mansion, suited to the fortune, and then to enjoy himself. See where the evil lies; not in thinking of to-morrow, in the way of making wise and prudent preparation, always taking along with us, "If the Lord will"; but the evil is that boasting of to-morrow which involves in sinful, at any rate in worldly and presumptuous plans, in reference to some future period, or that kind of reference to to-morrow which is a substitute for attention, immediate and serious, to our most important, even our eternal interests. II. THAT IT IS FOOLISH TO BOAST OF TO-MORROW. "We are young." Granted; but the young droop oftentimes. The green leaf often is seen falling, nipped by frost, or shaken by the wind. The young and strong have been called hence by disease or accident, the majority were young. "But we have stood already many trials of our constitution, and many attacks, and are yet vigorous." The last, however, will come, and the very next may be

fatal. "But we are a long-lived race. Father and mother, yea grandfather, and many relatives, lived to a great age." You forget the exceptions. "But we have somehow this persuasion, that we shall live long, and at any rate we will not indulge in gloomy presage of an early tomb." This is very delusive—it is foolish—you can give no reason for it—you may soon find you were deceiving yourselves.

III. THAT THERE IS MUCH DANGER IN INDULGING THIS DISPOSITION. 1. It fosters irreligion and atheism. Leaving out of calculation your own weak and dependent state, the uncertainty of time, and your ignorance of futurity, you form your plans without any reference to the Divine Disposer. You erect many high towering schemes, which savour at once of impiety and folly. 2. It is found to foster some of the worst passions of the human heart. The ambitious reason thus: A few steps more, and I shall rise to the very top of my profession, or of my rank in society, and that in the regular course of events, which supposes the removal of others by the stroke of mortality, as the means of elevation. The covetous man adds heap to heap, with desires more and more insatiable, forgetful of his latter end, and of that country to which he goes, where his wealth will be of no benefit. A due consideration of this might, by the Divine blessing, cut up by the roots this grovelling and idolatrous propensity, and give the soul a heavenward direction. A day may bring forth many most unexpected events, casting a dark cloud over the most flattering prospects. This present day improved may be the happy means of arresting the evil which the presumption of to-morrow tends so much to foster. 3. The boast of to-morrow is most prejudicial to spiritual and eternal concerns. It is the most successful of all Satan's devices, and the easiest mode of compassing his designs. (*W. Burns.*) *Ignorance of the future*:—I. To WHAT THE WORDS OF THE TEXT WILL APPLY. On some things we can calculate with a degree of certainty. Apply text—1. With regard to ourselves. And it will apply to both good and evil. The text seems to have in view evil. 2. To the dispensations of Providence. 3. This uncertainty regards our lives. Some are cut off in the midst of sin. Some in the midst of religious declensions. II. WHAT REASONS CAN BE GIVEN FOR THIS IGNORANCE OF FUTURITY. It never was designed that man should know the future. Even the angels in heaven have not this knowledge. Would such knowledge add to our happiness? or improve our religious character? This arrangement keeps us fully dependent on God. By this means He keeps the world in awe. III. APPLY THE FACT TO SOME USEFUL PURPOSES. 1. It should check vain curiosity. 2. It teaches us to hope for the best. 3. It is good to be prepared for the worst. 4. Learn the importance of real religion. (*Charles Hyatt.*)

Man's ignorance of futurity:—I. THE SENTIMENT CONTAINED IN THE TEXT. No man will attempt to controvert the assertion it makes. 1. We are ignorant of the future as to our circumstances. 2. We cannot tell what a day may bring forth as to the state of our bodies and our minds. 3. We are ignorant of the future as to our families and connections. 4. We are totally ignorant of futurity, as to the continuance of our lives. II. SOME LESSONS OF PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION. 1. Learn the importance of a life of faith and dependence on God. Man was never designed to be independent. 2. Learn to cultivate a spirit of holy resignation to the Divine will. 3. Learn to cultivate a spirit of cautious moderation as to the things of this present life. 4. Learn to cultivate a spirit of humility. (*R. Cameron.*) *Ignorance of the future*:—Mr. D. L. Moody says: "To recall the following act I would give my right hand. On the night when the Court House bell of Chicago was sounding an alarm of fire, my sermon was upon 'What shall I do with Jesus?' And I said to the audience, 'I want you to decide this question by next Sunday.' What a mistake! That night I saw the glare of flames, and knew that Chicago was doomed. I never saw that audience again."

Ver. 2. **Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth.**—*Self-boasting*:—Self-boasting is always a source of weakness as well as a revelation of vanity. In vanity there is no substance; it is idle breath, it is foolish vapour. When a man is left to praise himself it is evident that he has lived an inverted life, not a life full of blessedness and comfort in relation to other men. The sun does not praise himself, but under his splendour and warmth men look up and say how pleasing a thing it is for the eyes to behold the light. On the other hand, we must beware of a very common and perilous deceit. There is a sense in which every man ought to be able to praise himself; otherwise the applause of the public will be left by him to be a mockery and a lie. Our own heart should not condemn us. The psalmist was

wont to glory in his integrity, and to point to it as his refuge in the time of misunderstanding. (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

Ver. 3. Sand weighty.—*The weight of sand.*—By a fool this book means, not so much intellectual feebleness as moral and religious obliquity, which are the stupidest things that a man can be guilty of. The proverb-maker compares two heavy things, stones and sand, and says that they are feathers in comparison with the lead-like weight of such a man's wrath. I want to make a parable out of the text. What is lighter than a grain of sand? What is heavier than a bagful of it? The accumulation of light things is overwhelmingly ponderous. Is there anything in our lives like that? I. THIS REMINDS US OF THE SUPREME IMPORTANCE OF TRIFLES. The small things make life, and if they are small, then it is. We are poor judges of what is great or small. We have a very vulgar estimate of noise, notoriety, and bigness. We think the quiet things are the small ones. The most trivial actions have a knack of leading on to large results, beyond what could have been expected. These trivial actions make character. Men are not made by crises. The crises reveal what we have made ourselves by the trifles. We shape ourselves by the way we do small things. II. THE OVERWHELMING WEIGHT OF SMALL SINS. The accumulated pressure upon a man of a multitude of perfectly trivial faults and transgressions makes up a tremendous aggregate that weighs upon him. The words "great" and "small" should not be applied in reference to things about which "right" and "wrong" are the proper words to employ. Acts make crimes, but motives make sins. To talk about magnitude, in regard to sins, is rather to introduce an irrelevant consideration. Small sins, by reason of their numerousness, have a terribly accumulative power; a tremendous capacity for reproduction. All our evil doings have a strange affinity with one another. To go wrong in one direction leads to a whole series of consequential transgressions of one sort or another. Every sin makes us more accessible to the assaults of every other. If we indulge in slight acts of transgression, be sure of this, that we shall pass from them to far greater ones. An overwhelming weight of guilt results from the accumulation of little sins. III. PLAIN, PRACTICAL ISSUES OF THESE THOUGHTS. 1. The absolute necessity for all-round and ever-wakeful watchfulness of ourselves. 2. This thought may take down our easy and self-complacent estimate of ourselves. 3. Should we not turn ourselves with lowly hearts to Him who alone can deliver us from the habit and power of these accumulated faults, and who alone can lift the burden of guilt and responsibility from off our shoulders? (*A. Maclaren, D.D.*)

Ver. 4. Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?—*Anger and envy.*—I. THE EVIL PRINCIPLES INDICATED IN THE TEXT ARE EXTENSIVELY AND DANGEROUSLY PREVALENT. To be irritated and out of temper is one of the common tendencies of our nature, manifested even in childhood. The root is wrath, anger. This pernicious root grows differently in different natures, and with more or less vigour. This vicious principle is generally regarded too complacently, as though it were a necessary part of our nature. Wrath is dangerous. Its tendency is to increase. The spark will rise into a flame. The intensity of anger depends upon external circumstances, and also upon the condition of our health. The external exciting causes are continually changing. The foolish vice of irritating the temper of others is too common. Some like to torment the susceptible. Others are perpetually fault-finding and sneering. Envy is the condition of one who looks upon the happiness of another and longs to possess it. Envy generally seeks to conceal itself, and to work in secret and in darkness. Passion would strike down its victim in the public market-place, whilst envy would carefully weigh out and mix the poison for its victim to consume unconsciously in his food. This dangerous and deadly principle has extensive existence. Envy is the development of germs which are universally diffused. Then search into the very depths of your nature after the most minute germs of this evil. II. WHEREIN LIES OUR SAFETY AGAINST THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THESE PRINCIPLES? There may be lurking in our nature forces which need to be held in check by a stronger power than mere intellectual culture. Our higher civilisation too often only gilds crime, and throws its mantle over it. A formal profession of religion may cover the vilest lusts of humanity. There is a higher power. Christianity offers a Divine power by which the evil nature may be purified and every evil passion brought into subjection. Our safety, our only safety, lies in the renewal and sanctification of our nature by the Holy Ghost. Separated from the conscious presence of Christ,

and destitute of His renewing grace and protecting providence, who can tell into what mischief we may fall! (*Robert Ann.*) *The sin of envy*.—The envious man is far blacker than the passionate man; for the outrageous behaviour of an angry person sounds an alarm to his neighbour to be on his guard, but the envious man conceals his malignity till he has a fit opportunity to strike a mortal blow without danger of missing his aim. The one is a dog, that barks before he bites, the other is an adder in the grass, that stings the traveller when he is dreading no hurt; for the malice of the envious man is generally unsuspected, because no occasion was given for it. It is the good and happiness of the envied object that excited his malignity, and he does not so much as pretend that he has received any provocation. (*George Lawson, D.D.*) *The nature and mischief of envy*.—The wise man compares envy with two very exorbitant commotions of man's mind, wrath and anger. Worse than these, more unkind and uncharitable, more unjust, violent and mischievous, is envy. There is neither any goodness, nor yet any strength, that is a sufficient guard against it. 1. There is no man's innocency, no man's virtue, that can secure him from the direful strokes of envy. Sometimes a man's goodness actually inflames the hearts of the envious. See case of Cain and Abel; of Esau; of the brethren of Joseph; of Saul, &c. The greatest instance of all is the envy of Scribes and Pharisees against our Saviour. 2. There is no man so great and powerful, or of so secure an estate or fortune, but the violence of envy hath been capable of overthrowing him. Illustrate case of Abner. I. A JUST DESCRIPTION OF ENVY. It is a displeasure or trouble arising in a man's mind from the sight or knowledge of another man's prosperity, and causing a man to hate such person, and try to ruin him. It commonly arises on the sight of the prosperity of inferiors or equals. Men envy that to others which they think themselves as well or better to deserve. They seldom envy things or persons that are much above them. Distinguish envy from emulation. Illustrate by these two qualities in Saul and Jonathan, on the occasion of David's killing Goliath. Emulation is a great and noble virtue, envy a poor and sneaking vice. It is always hiding itself. No man will own himself to be envious. He disguises it under a mighty pretended zeal for the truth; or a great love for the public welfare; or a charitable concern for the credit of his neighbour. How few men are wholly free from this vice. II. THE MISCHIEVOUS EFFECTS PRODUCED BY ENVY. See these, that we may be more set against it; that we may avoid it ourselves; that we may beware of it in others; that we may use our utmost endeavours to quench this flame. Disturbances in the state, schism in the Church, and trouble in a neighbourhood, or in a private family, are generally traceable to envy. To what end is all this evil done by envious men? What do they get by it? Envy is its own punishment. No man can find a greater torment for an envious man than he inflicts upon himself. Even if it succeeds in pulling down a man, it very rarely gets into his place. How is it that God endures, and seems to leave alone, these mischief-making, envious men? They are agents in doing His disciplinary work in His people. It makes men self-watchful. The envious quickly light upon and show up faults that we might have passed over. The envious calumniate failings, not virtues. Remedies are—1. A right apprehension of the things of this world. 2. A due submission to the will of God. 3. A true humility. 4. A Christian charity. This last plucks it up by the very roots; and plants in our hearts what is most contrary thereto. (*Jonathan Blagrove, D.D.*)

Vers. 5, 6. *Open rebuke is better than secret love.—Charitable reproof*.—Self-love is so natural to us, that as it makes us apt to flatter ourselves on all occasions, so it inclines us to accept too easily of the flatteries of all others. Our unwillingness to know our own faults, or to be humbled under the sense of them, makes us uneasy when any venture on the most charitable, but often the most unacceptable, act of friendship, the telling us of our faults. But so long as we have faults it is very fit that we be made acquainted with them. And since we are too much blinded in our own favour, it is a great happiness to fall into the hands of such friends as will not spare us. No man can perform this act of friendship without some force put upon himself. Few love to touch a tender part, or to grieve a person who is dear to them. Friends see faults while they are yet secret, before they break out into open observation; so by the kind severity of their rebukes, they save from the shame which the discoveries that envy will soon make may bring. Friendship that carries a man to rebuke another plainly and roundly is better than secret love, or silent, indulgent, blind love. Such reproofs may be as wounds, and give a very painful uneasiness; but even that will be medicinal. The first and necessary

rule in managing our reproofs is, that no man should offer to reprove another, who is eminently and notoriously faulty himself. Another is, reprove in such a manner that it may appear we are their friends whom we reprove, and that we correct them for their own good. So much depends on the temper in which reproof is given. The most comprehensive rule is to order our reproofs with discretion and prudence. The things of which we find fault should be things of importance. Junior and inferior persons should not usually reprove their elders and superiors. And a wise and prudent time should be chosen. Take care that it is not a mere finding fault upon some general and popular notions. Illustrate such things as lewd conversation, swearing, &c. (*Bp. Gilbert.*) *False love* :—The contrast is not between “open reproof” and love that is not real, but only affected, and assuming the garb and manner of what is real, flatters and imposes upon its object. This could not, with propriety, be called “secret love.” It is professed love hiding enmity or indifference. “Secret love” is love which is indeed real, but which fails to speak out faithfully when it ought—when the good of its object calls for such fidelity; which shrinks from doing so because it is unwilling to inflict present pain; which thus connives at existing evils—silently allowing them to pass when they are such as ought to be noticed and reprobated. This is a false love, which really injures its object. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 6. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.—*God's friendship and Satan's enmity* :—True friends are scarce. The old cynic who went about in broad daylight with a lighted lantern in search of “a man” would have had like difficulty in finding a true friend. True friendship often assumes a rough garb; enmity may clothe itself in the stolen dress of love. Men like flattery better than the rebuke of the faithful friend. The truth-speaker often inflicts pain. I. **GOD'S FRIENDSHIP EVER BRINGS SORROW WITH IT.** Out of the depths of His loving heart, God summonses the prodigal sinner to return. If he returns he must expect a weary journey. It is a toilsome path, that rugged one of repentance. II. **SATAN'S ENMITY IS OFTEN DISGUISED BY MEANS OF DECEITFUL OFFERS OF JOY.** An enemy, he deals in pretences of love, and deceives with a kiss. When Satan tempted Christ, he came as it were with kisses—that is, with bribes. Is it not ever so? Sin wears the garb of friendship without its reality, and men are slaves to appearances. The truly wise man best shows his wisdom by detecting the embraces of an enemy, the false promise, the lying lips. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 7. The full soul loatheth an honeycomb.—*Spiritual appetite* :—It is a great blessing when food and appetite meet together. Sometimes men have been so luxuriously fed that appetite has departed from them altogether. The rules which apply to bodily appetite equally hold true of the mind. We easily lose our taste for anything of which we have our fill. Men in the things of God have not always an appetite for the sweetest and most precious truth. I. **JESUS CHRIST IS HIMSELF SWEETER THAN THE HONEYCOMB.** This is clear if we consider who He is, and what He gives and does. Our Lord is the incarnation of Divine love. The love of God is sweet, and Jesus is that love made manifest. Jesus is in Himself the embodiment of boundless mercy to sinners as well as love to creatures. Jesus must be sweet, for He meets all our wants as sinners. He breathes into our hearts the sweetness of abounding peace. His very name is redolent of celestial hope to believers. Jesus is sweet to God Himself, and to the angels in heaven. It is His presence that makes heaven what it is. II. **THERE ARE THOSE WHO LOATHE THE SWEETNESS OF OUR LORD.** Some loathe Him so as to trample on Him. Others are always murmuring at Him. Some are utterly indifferent to Him. The loathing manifests itself by little signs. It comes of a soul's being full—of the world; of outward religiousness; or of pride. III. **THERE ARE SOME WHO DO APPRECIATE THE SWEETNESS OF CHRIST.** Pray for a good appetite for Christ, and when you have it, keep it. Do not waste a good appetite upon anything less sweet than the true honeycomb. When you have the appetite, indulge it. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *An appetite for good things essential for their enjoyment* :—To appreciate a thing you must first feel its want. This applies to—I. **CORPOREAL GOOD.** It is appetite that makes bodily food sweet and enjoyable. Delicious was the manna to the Israelites at first. Which of the two is the more blest, the man who has the abundance of the enjoyable without the power of enjoying or he who has the scarcest and humblest fare with the full relish of the hungry soul? II. **INTELLECTUAL GOOD.** A man may have an immense library, and no appetite for books. To him

the priceless library is worse than worthless. I'd rather be the man of one book, nay, of no book at all but the book of my own soul—the book of nature—with an appetite for truth, than the owner of the choicest library of the world with no desire for knowledge. III. SPIRITUAL GOOD. (D. Thomas, D.D.)

Ver. 8. As a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place.—*The inconvenience and danger of persons being long absent from home*:—Nothing that affects our religious interests can, properly speaking, be called little. Everything that can influence the present temper and future state of the soul is weighty and important. This text is a caution against a rambling spirit in general. "A bird that wandereth from her nest" leaves her eggs unhatched, or starves her young ones, or exposes them to peril. The evil consequences of restless and prolonged wanderings from home are—1. They who wander lose many relative comforts. A heathen philosopher observes that "wanderers about have many acquaintances, but few friends." 2. The domestic affairs of wanderers greatly suffer. Their work either stands still, or goes on very indifferently. 3. Precious time is lost in wandering from home. Many whose lawful business leads them abroad stay much longer than is needful. They trifle at every place where they come, and must chat with every person who hath as little prudence as themselves. 4. Wanderers are exposed to many temptations which ought to be avoided. 5. This habit is a great hindrance to family religion. Apply these thoughts to ourselves, and inquire how far we are concerned in this admonition. It is important for young people to cultivate a habit of staying at home. It is peculiarly bad in servants to wander from their place. Relations should endeavour to make home agreeable to one another. It is especially bad to wander from the house of God. (J. Orton.)

Wandering birds:—Some people are always restless; they must move about. They are like wandering birds. Such people do not know that the right place is always the best place for them. Whatever is our calling in life, let us not be in a hurry to leave it. Depend upon it, where God has placed us is the best for us after all. The right place for us all is where we can best serve Jesus, and where we can glorify Him. A bird that wanders from its nest is one that will get into danger and trouble. A bird that wanders from its nest will lose its nest. Three counsels—1. Love your own nest, and stay in it. 2. Keep the nest clean, and make your home happy. 3. No nest is so good for you as your own, and therefore do not seek to change it. (J. J. Ellis.)

The wanderer:—I. AS THE BIRD HAS ITS NEST, SO MAN HAS HIS PLACE. And both are of Divine appointment. Behind the instinct of the bird and the social nature of man we must recognise the purpose of God. Man's place is in—1. The home. "God setteth the solitary in families." 2. In society. "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers, for the powers that be are ordained of God." 3. In the Church, its fellowship, worship, work. II. AS THE BIRD NEEDS THE NEST, SO THE MAN NEEDS THE PLACE. III. AS THE NEST NEEDS THE BIRD, SO THE PLACE NEEDS THE MAN. IV. "WANDERING." V. THE CONSEQUENCES OF WANDERING. VI. APPEAL TO WANDERERS. Come back! the place waits for you. Your own heart echoes its cry. (*Homiletic Review*.) *Unnaturalness*:—Sin reverses Divine arrangements. It is consequently the most unnatural thing in God's universe. We speak of "natural depravity"; it is, properly speaking, un-natural depravity. Sin is earth's exotic; the soul's nightshade; it has "turned the world upside down," and thrust man out of his proper place. I. MAN IN HIS WRONG PLACE. Here called "a wanderer." "Where art thou?" God asked Adam; intimating that he was not where he ought to have been. Sin had turned him out of his place. Some things concerning man's original state—the place from which he had wandered. 1. It was a state of conscious Divine approval. Conscience was at rest. 2. A state of Divine illumination. The creature enjoyed the high privilege of companionship with his Creator. Sin has both stained the conscience and darkened the understanding. 3. A state of Divine sympathies. His supreme affections were centred in his Maker. Towards Him his emotions moved like bright constellations round the sun. The fatal mistake sin has introduced into the hearts of men is the vain attempt to meet the wants of the spiritual in the supplies of the material. II. MAN IN HIS RIGHT PLACE. "Man is as his heart is." The evils which have been enumerated arise from the moral derangement of the affections. The gospel comes to restore the forfeited "place" by restoring lost confidence. It does so by revealing God in such a way as to inspire confidence. The gospel is the revelation of Divine love putting away sin, and bringing the sinner near to Himself. The soul's resting-place is faith and love. (G. Hunt Jackson.)

The wandering bird :—Persons of the vagrant kind seldom, if ever, prosper. 1. In the common affairs of life Solomon was correct. The unrest of that man's mind, and the instability of his conduct, who is constantly making a change of his position and purpose, augurs no success for any of his adventures. See cases of eagerness to leave the native country; changing occupation; changing situation and acquaintance. And it is certainly true in changing one's religious service in the cause of God. 2. In spiritual things. There is a tendency in us all to be looking for evidences, signs, marks, experiences, graces, and coincidences of one kind or another. When a Christian wanders from his place—from the simplicity of his faith in Jesus—that moment he departs from his safe shelter in the solid rock. Many believers wander out of their place. A believer's place is in the bosom of his Lord, or at the right hand of his Master, or sitting at His feet with Mary. Wandering habits imply a lack of watchfulness. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The wandering bird* :—The teaching of the proverb may be, that a man who leaves his own home, his own proper sphere, situation, calling, is strange, awkward, lonely, exposed—he has got away from duty and into danger, and is forlorn as a lost bird that has got away from its nest and cannot find its way back. Our subject is that men, institutions, Churches, are most useful when faithful to their own particular calling, and when true to their own distinctive characteristics. There is some danger lest Christian Churches should wander from their place. Far be it from me to depreciate the importance of social questions and social work. But we are told that we are strong in the degree in which we take in hand social questions, and play the part of social reformers. But our work is supremely spiritual; our work is to the soul of man. To us, the main cause of the misery which is in this world is to be found in the spiritual condition of men, in their alienation from God. The Church of Christ is not to be a food-supply association, nor a banking company, nor a society for the reform of manners. Our work is to bring men to God. The monition of the text may be applied to individuals. There are few things more common than for men to forsake the sphere in which their own peculiar powers have ample scope for a sphere in which those powers are scarcely required at all. An infatuation sometimes leads men to seek positions to which they are not called, and for which they are manifestly unfit. Some of us are not allowed to remain in one place. We are compelled to be wanderers on the face of the earth. The determination to abide in one's own lot, and to be true to one's own gifts and aptitudes, is the secret of power. If a man will prove his own work, he shall have rejoicing in himself. Cultivate a vivid sense of personality and a solemn conviction of our own individual significance. You will not best serve your generation by becoming a washed-out reproduction of some stronger character. If a man honestly does the best with his own powers in his own place, he will not live in vain. We cannot escape from our personal limitations, but we may do good work, and minister much blessing notwithstanding. We also wander from our place when we neglect the things that are about us, and strain after strange and distant things, for satisfaction. The highest and best things are possible to us where we are. In our own place the highest culture of character is possible. Our place has no limitations for spiritual growth. We can be men in Christ Jesus where we are. So let there be no repining and no wandering. He orders our lot; let us stand in it. (*James Lewis.*)

Ver. 10. *Better is a neighbour that is near than a brother far off.*—*Sociability* :—This proverb points out that when assistance is needed the near neighbour, though he may love less, is more useful than the brother who is far away. Society is absolutely necessary for human existence. Companionship forces us to think and feel in common. A large-hearted sociability corrects irrational prejudices. As no two minds are exactly alike, so no two can see any subject from exactly the same standpoint. The greater number of minds we can bring to bear on any aspect of truth, the nearer shall we be to the aspect that is right. It may be objected that many think erroneously, and therefore companionship with them would lead us from, and not towards, the truth. It would if we adopted their opinions, but not if, by sifting and searching them, we grasped our own more firmly. The same holds true in the realm of Christian experience. Sociability is, then, a duty we all owe to society, one which we ought scrupulously to pay according to our means and our opportunities. About the nature of true sociability great mistakes are made. Amusement is not the first purpose of society. To be truly sociable we must be able to make society more Christian than it was; to infuse into it something more,

however little, of the spirit of sympathy, truth, purity, and love than it had. But to do this we must have the spirit ourselves. We ought also to be able to make it more intellectual, by adding information, giving ideas, and stimulating to mental effort. Then we cannot always be in society. It is in solitude we gather those germs of thought that we are afterwards to scatter. The power we have of influencing society by our words is one whose value we cannot over-estimate, one that ought to be cultivated to the very highest pitch. The benefit derived from companionship must depend on the persons with whom we associate. Bad companions have led many to ruin. Sociability has a tendency to produce hypocrisy, and subsequent self-deception in certain characters. Conversation in society is, too often, neither true nor edifying. By insensible degrees the vapid talker becomes the idle gossip, and the gossip sinks into the venomous slanderer. It is, then, in our power to influence society for good or ill. Sociability must be either a curse or a blessing as we use it. (*J. McCann, D.D.*) *Friendship*:—The Lord Jesus found strength and consolation in the love of human friends. That He should not only have pitied men, and loved them, but should have found here and there men and women whose presence and affection were a relief to Him, under the burden of His griefs; men and women who gave Him rest when He was weary, and joy when He was troubled; this may seem surprising to us. Christ Himself, the Son of the Eternal, had His human friends. He loved all men well enough to die for them, but there were some whom He loved more than others. 1. Some men are so happy as to inherit friends from their fathers. The love of our father's friend is worth having. If he is a good man, there will be a certain power in him that will be a restraint to keep now in the good way your father would have approved. Your father's experience of life survives in him to give you counsel. If he should ever be in trouble, pay your father's debts in friendly attention to him. 2. "Thine own friend forsake not." There are friends and friends. Most of our friends are acquaintances, and nothing more. Friendships of the perfect and ideal sort are necessarily rare. By friends we mean those for whom we have a strong affection, and who have a strong affection for us. A wise man said, "I want my friends to stand by me when I am wrong; other people will stand by me when I am right." When you have friends of that sort, forsake them not. Keep them when you have them. 3. Friendships which fall far short of this ideal are also worth keeping. For the most part our friends must be people whose circumstances and education and history are very much like our own. There are people who drop a whole set of their "friends" whenever they get a considerable rise in their income. For the most part, close and real friendships must be formed early in life. When close friendships are formed after a man has passed middle life, it is usually with much younger persons. 4. Of the place and power of friendship in life, only those who have had and retained loyal and worthy friends, can have any real knowledge. Bacon says, "Friendship redoubleth joys and cutteth grief in halves." Friendships assist to check and to subdue that selfish absorption in our own successes and in our own sorrows which poison the very springs of life and brings paralysis on all its nobler powers. Our confidence in their goodness and our delight in their affection save us from cynicism. We think the better of the human race because we think so well of them. When we do not absolutely accept the judgment of a friend, it clears our mind to discuss a difficult question with him. Our friends take the side of all that is best in us against whatever is mean and cowardly and dangerous; they serve the purpose of an external conscience. Our friends see us, not merely as we are, but as we might be. 5. The Christian will form his closest friendships with men who share his faith in Christ and his hope of immortality. Such friends will continue to be our friends in the realms that lie beyond death. (*R. W. Dale, LL.D.*) *Genuine friendship*:—I. FRIENDSHIP IS BASED ON TRUE LOVE. Concord of sentiment, agreement of taste, unity of purpose, frequent companionship, are not enough. These may exist without the binding together of hearts. Love is the essential element of true friendship. "For my friend first, and then for myself," is the spirit of true friendship. The idea of sacrifice is in friendship, and sacrifice is in the very nature of love. II. FRIENDSHIP IS RECIPROCAL IN ITS GROWTH AND PRESERVATION. It cannot be a one-sided thing. Seneca said, "Love if you wish to be loved." The atmosphere of suspicion or distrust is fatal to real friendship. III. GENUINE FRIENDSHIP STRENGTHENS IN THE TIME OF TRIAL. There is nothing like adversity to test life's attachments. See some points of duty in true friendship. Do not encourage your friend to your secrets. If they are disclosed, see that you never betray them.

There is a becoming reticence and dignity even in friendship. Do not think you can treat your friend anyhow because he is your friend. The dearest friendships cannot dispense with thoughtfulness, kindness, and politeness. Do not allow any trivial matter to interfere with your friendship. Do not forget to pray for, and seek, the spiritual welfare of your friend. As you believe in the power of prayer, pray for your friend. Cultivate close and endearing fellowship with the best Friend—the Friend of Sinners. (*J. Hiles Hitchens, D.D.*) *On friendship*:—Whatever relates to the behaviour of men in their social character is of great importance in religion. The duties which spring from that character form many branches of the great law of charity. True piety is not less friendly to men than zealous for the honour of God. Deal with the nature and duties of virtuous friendship, as closely connected with the true spirit of religion. Among mankind, friendships or connections are of different kinds. Some so-called friendships would better be called conspiracies. Some are but the connections of political parties. Private friendships flow from similarity of disposition, corresponding harmony of minds. Sincere and affectionate friendships form some of the greatest blessings of human life. The fundamental duties of true friendship are constancy and fidelity. 1. Do not expect perfection in any with whom you contract friendship. If we do, we shall be sure to meet with disappointments. Young people are apt to cherish romantic ideas, and to form impossible expectations. In the best persons, great and solid qualities counterbalance the common infirmities. To these qualities you should look in forming friendships; to good-sense and prudence; virtue, good-temper and steadiness of affection. 2. Do not be hurt by differences of opinion arising in intercourse with your friends. These are sure to occur. Perpetual uniformity of thought would become monotonous and insipid. 3. Cultivate openness of temper and manners. Nothing more certainly dissolves friendship than the jealousy which arises from darkness and concealment. 4. Cultivate gentle and obliging manners. It is a common error that familiar intimacy supersedes attention to the lesser duties of behaviour. Let no harshness, no appearance of neglect, no supercilious affectation of superiority, occur in the intercourse of friends. A tart reply, a proneness to rebuke, a captious and contradictory spirit, are often known to embitter domestic life and to set friends at variance. 5. Do not rashly listen to evil reports against your friends. Be slow of believing anything against the friend whom you have chosen. Suffer not the poison of jealousy easily to taint your mind and break your peace. 6. Do not desert your friend in danger or distress. When your friend is calumniated, then is the time openly and boldly to espouse his cause. The honourable zeal of friendship has, in every age, attracted the veneration of mankind. (*Hugh Blair, D.D.*) *Reasons for valuing true friendship*:—1. Because of the pleasure of it. There is a great deal of sweetness in consulting and conversing with a cordial friend. The sweetness of friendship lies not in hearty mirth, but in hearty counsel, faithful advice, sincerely given, and without flattery. 2. Because of the profit and advantage of it, especially in a day of calamity. Don't expect relief from a kinsman for kinsman's sake, but apply yourselves to your neighbours, who are at hand, and will be ready to help us at an exigence. (*Matthew Henry.*) *The friendship of God towards man, and man towards God*:—There is no friend like an old friend. It is the heat of a whole life that has melted together the hearts of those who have walked together the long walk of life as friends. It is possible for any who seek the Lord and His will to be reckoned among His friends. God is the Friend of man; and man is admitted to be the friend of God. What are the terms on which we should stand towards a friend? In hollow friendships two things are wanting, faith and love. But in the friendship we are permitted to cherish towards God these are the very corner-stones, an enlightened lively faith and a glowing active love. Are we enjoying the heavenly sunshine of this Divine fatherly friendship? If so, we shall show it in our own faithful, affectionate life, as friends of God. Of all living agencies a friend is the most alive, the most alert. (*Archdeacon Mildmay.*) *Near and far off*:—The antithetical phrases, “at hand” and “far off,” have evident reference here, not to locality, but to disposition. A friendly and kindly-disposed neighbour, who bears no relation to us save that of neighbourhood, is greatly preferable to a brother—to any relation whatever—who is cold, distant, and alienated. Even natural affection requires to be exercised with discretion. When appealed to injudiciously, at improper times, in improper circumstances, and with improper frequency, it may be cooled, it may be lost, it may be turned to dislike. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 12. **A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.**—*Eyes and no eyes:*—The distinction is not between “goodness” and “wickedness,” but between strength and weakness, wisdom and folly. The “seeing” and the “acting” man victoriously compels circumstances to further his own ends. The “blind” and the “drifting” man is conquered by the force of circumstances, and suffers penalty and loss. The proverb is applicable to every sphere of human life and effort, and becomes more and more rigidly and absolutely true the higher we ascend. In the lower spheres of action there may appear evils which the most prudent man cannot avoid; and the “simple” may sometimes escape disaster by a fortunate combination of circumstances. But these are exceptions. When we ascend to the sphere of moral and spiritual efforts, even the exceptions vanish, and the principle becomes absolute. 1. Man’s life and destiny are determined, not by an inexorable and eternal fate, but by his free manhood. Circumstances are the material out of which he has to weave the garment of his life, and it depends upon himself whether it shall be a garment for honour or dishonour. 2. The radical distinction between men lies in the possession of true vision. The true man sees the realities of things, gazes into the truer and eternal. The unspiritual man sees only the show and appearance of things. This true vision, being an essential characteristic of the spiritual man, is more than intellectual apprehension. It is a perception in which the whole being is exercised. 3. True vision determines true action. There is a sense in which a man may “see,” and yet follow his evil passions rather than his nobler knowledge. But in such cases there is something perilously defective in the vision. It has lacked depth and splendour, and divineness. 4. “Vision” and “action” determine destiny. “Drifting” is fatal; to “pass on” in the unresisted current of circumstances is “to suffer.” For lack of the “true vision” that creates true action empires have perished, and individuals are subject to the same law. Spiritual blindness is death. (*John Thomas, M.A.*) *The foresight of prudence:*—A good husband will repair his house while the weather is fair, not put it off till winter; a careful pilot will take advantage of wind and tide, and so put out to sea, not stay till a storm arise. The traveller will take his time in his journey, and mind his pace when the night comes on, lest darkness overtake him; the smith will strike while the iron is hot, lest it grow cool, and so he lose his labour; so we ought to make every day the day of our repentance; to make use of the present time, that when we come to die we may have nothing to do but to die, for there will be a time when there will be no place for repentance, when time will be no more; when the door will be shut, when there will be no entrance at all. (*J. Spencer.*)

Ver. 14. **He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him.**—*The curse of ostentatious flattery:*—Flattery is a species of conduct generally most pleasing, always most pernicious. The flattery in the text is a loud vaunting. It intrudes itself on all occasions; it is busy and demonstrative. I. It is a CURSE TO ITS AUTHOR. He who practises sycophancy inflicts an incalculable injury on his own spiritual nature. The spirit of independence, the feeling of honest manhood, give way to a crawling, creeping instinct; it is a sneaking art used to cajole and soften fools. II. It is a CURSE TO ITS VICTIM. Perhaps this is what Solomon means when he says “it shall be counted a curse to him,” i.e., the object of it. “Of all wild beasts,” says Johnson, “preserve me from a flatterer.” (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 17. **Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.**—*Friendship:*—Scripture instances of friendship are David and Jonathan; Ruth and Naomi; Paul and Timotheus; and our Lord and the Bethany sisters. In classical literature we see that friendship had a great part, both in the government of states and the lives of individuals. It is an aspect of politics and of human nature, and of all virtue. Partly owing to the different character of domestic life, the tie of friendship seems to have exercised a greater influence amongst the Greeks and Romans than among ourselves; and although these attachments may sometimes have degenerated into evil, we cannot doubt that much that was noble in the old life was also pure. See cases of Achilles and Patroclus, and of Pylades and Orestes. The school of Socrates was as much a circle of friends as a band of disciples. Roman friendships are illustrated in Scipio and Laelius, and in Cicero and Atticus. Shakespeare gives several types of

friendship. In youth, when life is opening before us, we easily form friendships. A young man, even if he be poor in worldly goods, may reasonably hope to be rich in friends. Like draws towards like, and youth rejoices in youth. We cannot make friendships exactly as we please. Friendships are not made, but grow out of similar tastes, out of mutual respect, from the discovery of some hitherto unsuspected vein of sympathy. They depend also on our own power of inspiring friendship in others. Yet neither is the choice of friends altogether independent of ourselves. A man may properly seek for friends. He gets good, or he gets harm, out of the companionship of those with whom he lives. Such as they are he will be in some degree.

I. THE CHARACTER OF TRUE FRIENDSHIP. It should be simple, manly, unreserved; not weak, or fond, or extravagant, nor yet exacting more than human nature can fairly give; nor intrusive into the secrets of another's soul, or curious about his circumstances. The greatest element in friendship is faithfulness. Friends learn from one another; they form the characters of one another; they bear one another's burdens; they make up for each other's defects. The ancients spoke of three kinds of friendship—one for the sake of the useful, one for the sake of the pleasant, and a third for the sake of the good or noble. The first is a contradiction in terms. It is a partnership, not a friendship. Every one knows the delight of having a friend. Is there a friendship for the sake of the noble and the good? Mankind are dependent beings, and we cannot help seeing how much, when connected together, they may do for the elevation of one another's character and for the improvement of mankind.

II. CHANGING FRIENDSHIPS. Like the other goods of life, friendship is commonly mixed and imperfect, and liable to be interrupted by changing circumstances or the tempers of men. Few have the same friends in youth as in age. Some youthful friendships are too violent to last; they have in them some element of weakness or sentimentalism, and the feelings pass away. Or, at some critical time of life, a friend has failed to stand by us, and then our love to him grows cold. But there are duties we owe to an extinct friend. We should never speak against him, or make use of our knowledge about him. A passing word should not be suffered to interrupt the friendship of years. It is a curious observation, that the most sensitive natures are also the most liable to pain the feelings of others.

III. CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP. The spirit of a man's life may be more or less consciously Christian. Friendship may be based on religious motives, and may flow out of a religious principle. Human friendships constantly require to be purified and raised from earth to heaven. And yet they should not lose themselves in spiritual emotion or in unreal words. Better that friendship should have no element of religion than that it should degenerate into cant and insincerity. All of us may sometimes think of ourselves and our friends as living to God, and of human love as bearing the image of the Divine. There are some among us who have known what it is to lose a friend. Death is a gracious teacher. Who that has lost a friend would not wish to have done more for him now that he is taken away? The memory of them is still consecrated and elevating for our lives.

(Professor Jowett.) *Friendship*:—This is what one friend should be to another; a whetstone, to give keenness to the edge of his energy. A friend can encourage his friend when duty is difficult, or wearisome, or painful; can comfort, can advise. But friendship is too often made the stepping-stone to the worst falls; and many a sinner has his friends to thank for his having fallen into sins which, left to himself, he would have shrunk from with horror. God has mercifully hedged round most sins with many barriers—the barrier of ignorance, of shame, and of affection. This latter, in a personal friend, may be especially helpful. A friend may aid us in both the right and the wrong. It is sometimes the duty of a true friend openly to find fault with a friend. But the occasion is very rare. In most cases all that is wanted is to hold to the right, and you will do more towards holding your friend to the right than by all manner of exhortations. Few things can give acuter pain to the soul in after-years than the memory of friends misled by our friendship. Friendship, and sympathy, and cheerful example ought to help us more than anything else to grow up soldiers and servants of Christ, and to fight His battle when we are grown up. Iron cannot sharpen iron more than we might sharpen each other. The very differences in our character might be such a help to us in making friendship valuable, because when one friend is much tempted the other is strong, and can uphold him, and yet, when another kind of temptation comes, will receive back as much support as he gave. (Frederick Temple, D.D.) "*A friend in need is a friend indeed*":—Bacon says, "To be without friends is to find the

world a wilderness." It is only a mean man that can be contented alone. A trusty friend is one of earth's greatest blessings. Alas, for the dire contagion of evil friendships! Washington said, "Be courteous to all, intimate with few, and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence." Stick to your friend. He can never have any true friends who is often changing them. Bring your friend to a proper understanding of himself. Persuade him of his follies. Phocion said truly to Antipater, "I cannot be both your friend and flatterer." True friendship cannot exist between bad men. True friendship is tested in the hour of adversity. Wait until you are in trouble, and many a professed friend will be shy of you and give you the dead cut. Many people expect too much from their friends. There is an old saying that "Friends, like fiddle-strings, must not be screwed too tight." Friendships are often productive of mischief because they are not governed by wisdom and prudence. He is our best friend who is a friend to our soul. Give a wide berth to the sneering sceptic. Have for your bosom friends men who will "strengthen your hand in God," who will foster your piety and make you wiser, better, and holier men. In Christ alone the proverb at the heading of this outline finds its fullest verification. (*M. C. Peters.*) *Friendly converse*:—This proverb is described by Edward Irving as forcibly expressing the effect of religious converse and communion by a beautiful figure, which also not inaptly represents the way in which the effect is produced. Iron sharpeneth iron by removing the rust which has been contracted from their lying apart; so intercourse between friend and friend rubs down the prejudices which they have contracted in their separate state. And as the iron, having removed the rust which entered into the good stuff of the blade, and hindered its employment for husbandry or war, straightway applies itself to the metallic substance, brings it to a polish and to an edge, shows its proper temper, and fits it for its proper use, so the intercourse of friends having removed the prejudices which were foreign to the nature and good conditions of each, proceeds, in the next place, to bring out the slumbering spirit which lay hid, to kindle each other into brightness, and prepare each other for action. (*Francis Jacox.*) *The sharpening influence of religious intercourse*:—We are all acquainted with the every-day fact that "iron sharpeneth iron"; we have all seen steel used to sharpen a blade, to give it an edge, and make it fit to do its work. We are also well aware that the blade, when sharpened, may be used for a good purpose, or abused for a bad one. The axe may be used to fell the timber of the temple, or to break down all the carved work thereof. The steel or the whetstone to sharpen, fits the blade for doing good or doing evil, according to circumstances. The act of sharpening increases its power, whether for good or evil; and so is it with regard to a man's friends—they stir him up, they excite him, but it is to good or to evil, according as they themselves are good or evil. We must take care who our friends are, lest we receive mischief; take care what kind of friends we are, lest we impart it. Those who countenance what is wrong are answerable for much of the evil their countenance leads to. For instance, all persons should take great care to what they are led by the countenance and encouragement of friends on occasions of public festivity or show. Many on such occasions have their countenances sharpened as they are not on other days. They are encouraged to say, to do, to boast, to indulge, as they never would do, and never do, when sitting at home in their own houses. It is a pleasing thought, however, that the man whose heart is right with God "sharpeneth" for good "the countenance of his friend." There is nothing more false upon true religion than to imagine that it stunts our minds, that its design is to withdraw them from the genial warmth of social life, where it may blossom—where, like a healthy plant, it may open and expand, and place them alone, to become proud and selfish. True religion, like every other good sentiment, requires society to bring it to perfection. Now, if there be something so valuable in the intercourse of true Christians, they should seek it in the spirit best calculated to profit by such communion. They should seek it in Christian friendship. They should constantly be on the look-out for those who are willing to drink deep with them at the fountain of Divine truth. But our expectations from this truth are not to be limited to the exercise of private friendship. We cannot all be bound together by such ties, desirable as they are; but then, again, all real Christians are real friends. They may never have spoken; they may want introduction one to another; distance of situation may keep them apart; circumstances may keep them unacquainted though near in point of neighbourhood; yet have they, being all partakers of the same Spirit, that which

is calculated, under altered circumstances, to make and keep them friends. All Christians, I repeat, are friends; and, therefore, we may expect many circumstances, short of strict and intimate friendship, calculated to bring into play the principle upon which I have been dwelling. I shall mention two circumstances under which this may happen. 1. I would recommend all persons to seek this means of improvement in their families. With his family is every Christian bound to share, and by sharing to increase, his devout affections. There are innumerable degrees of life among the members of our Lord: there are all the stages from simple consecration to Him, in baptism and profession, to the fullest union. To be helpers of each other's faith throughout these several stages—to become by mutual communication joint partakers of one common Spirit—is one of the most effectual means of spiritual growth. "He that watereth may hope to be watered also himself." 2. But this is not all: he is in the way to have his own "countenance sharpened," his own motives quickened, his own soul stirred up to watchfulness, love, zeal, diligence, and an endeavour at being consistent. If we know ourselves, we know that we want every kind of motive, every sort of help. Then let every Christian try the power of meeting each morning and evening to pray together with his family. But, if so, how much more should we thank God for those further helps which He affords to us in the public assemblies of the congregation. Here especially the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above. If we came to His house expecting much, imploring much, desiring much, we should gain much. Our God would enrich us, and that partly through the channel of our "fellowship one with another." (*J. H. A. Walsh, M.A.*)

Ver. 18. *So he that waiteth on his master shall be honoured.*—*The way to honour*:—If a man in Palestine carefully watched his fig-tree, and kept it in proper condition, he was sure to be abundantly rewarded in due season. So good servants obtain honour as the fruit of diligent service. I. *THE RELATION WHICH SUBSISTS BETWEEN OURSELVES AND OUR LORD—HE IS OUR MASTER.* You are men, and naturally moved by all which moves other men, but still the master motive power with you who are Christians is the supremacy of Christ. He has a right to be our Master from the very dignity of His character. We yield Him service because of His love to us. And our position of servants is an irreversible one. II. *THERE IS A CONDUCT CONSISTENT WITH BEING SERVANTS OF JESUS.* A servant should—1. Own himself to be his Master's. 2. Have no time at his own disposal. 3. Be always about his Master's business. As servants it is our duty to learn our Master's will, and to do it when we know it. It is ours also to obey the Master willingly, and for love of His person. The waiting upon the Master is to be performed personally by the servant. It is ours, in waiting, to abide near to Christ. III. *THE REWARD WHICH SURELY COMES TO FAITHFUL SERVANTS.* He finds his honour in waiting upon his Master. Every faithful servant of Christ is honoured in his Master's honour. He is honoured with his Master's approval. He is honoured by having more given him to do. He is honoured in the eyes of his fellow-servants. But the chief honour of the faithful servant comes from the blessed Trinity. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*) *The reward of God's servants*:—He who tends the fig-tree has figs for his pains, and he who waits on a good master has honour as his reward. Truly the Lord Jesus is the very best of masters, and it is an honour to be allowed to do the least act for His sake. To serve some lords is to watch over a crab-tree and eat the crabs as one's wages; but to serve my Lord Jesus is to keep a fig-tree of the sweetest figs. His service is in itself delight; continuance in it is promotion; success in it is blessedness below; and the reward for it is glory above. Our greatest honours will be gathered in that season when the figs will be ripe, even in the next world. Angels who are now our servitors will bear us home when our day's work is done. Heaven, where Jesus is, will be our honourable mansion, eternal bliss our honourable portion, and the Lord Himself our honourable companion. (*Ibid.*) *An honoured servant*:—Melancthon's friends were astonished at his liberality, and wondered how, with his small means, he could afford to give so much in charity. It was principally owing to the good management of a faithful servant named John. The whole duty of providing for the family was entrusted to this domestic, whose care and prudence amply justified the confidence reposed in him. He avoided all needless expenditure, and watched with a jealous eye his master's property. He was also the first instructor of the children during their infancy. John grew old in his master's service, and expired in his house, regretted by all. During a service of thirty-four years how much

usefulness was effected by honest John, and by his master, through his instrumentality! Melancthon invited the students of the university to attend the funeral of his faithful servant; delivered an oration over his grave; and composed a Latin epitaph for his tombstone.

Ver. 19. As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man.—Mirror of human nature :—As a man looking into the water (used anciently as a mirror) sees an exact transcript of his own countenance, so every heart has, by nature, precisely the same moral character with every other unsanctified heart. Every child of Adam, till renewed by Divine grace, has, in view of Omnipotence and Omniscience, the same moral aspect. Notice some of the circumstances which have contributed to make men differ in their conduct who have by nature the same moral character. Grace has made a wide difference in men who were by nature alike. Difference in instinctive passions and affections makes men differ in their conduct. Some have not the talents for doing mischief that others have. Others have not the opportunities. One man may achieve less mischief than another because more restrained. 1. That all men have naturally the same moral character might be inferred from the similarity of origin, aspect, and general habits that belong to all ages and all nations of men. 2. We can hardly fix our eye on any individual or community of antiquity but we can find its exact resemblance in some individual or community with whose character we are familiar. Of this take as Scriptural examples the family of Adam and of Jacob; the characters of Balaam, and of Shimei, and of Joab, and of Jezebel. 3. There have prevailed in all ages and nations the same crimes, calling for the restraining influence of the same laws. Men have been at all times inclined to wrong their fellow-men of their property. The descriptions of depravity which applied to Israel, Babylon, Egypt, Syria, Sidon, and even Edom, apply with equal propriety to the men of this land. 4. Argue from the fact that the Bible has never become obsolete. It describes men of other periods, and the description suits the present generation. Remarks: (1) We see one source of those corruptions of doctrine with which the world is filled. Men have determined that human nature has grown better. Having settled this point, they infer that the same Bible will not suit the different ages and nations. (2) This subject justifies a kind of preaching as plain and pointed as anything found in the law of God, or in the communications of Christ and His apostles. (3) The subject furnishes ungodly men with the means of knowing their own characters. (4) We may argue, from this subject, that men must all pass the same second birth to fit them for the kingdom of God. (5) We see why there need be but one place of destiny in the coming world for all the unregenerate. The little shades of difference that now appear in the ungodly are too insignificant to mark them out for distinct worlds. (*D. A. Clark.*) *They who are our associates in this world will most probably be our associates in the next :—*Bishop Patrick explains this proverb thus: "A man may see himself, while he looks upon other men, as well as know other men, by considering his own inclinations." Bishop Hall says: "He that looks into his friend's heart sees there his own." The most mysterious thing in God's work is the heart of man. The Eden of the human heart has been transformed into a wilderness of vile passions. Some restrain themselves more than others, and therefore there are different degrees of depravity in the world; and perhaps, by looking around us, we may find what rank we properly belong to, and what chance we have of escaping the wrath of God. 1. Let us ask ourselves who are our intimate friends and associates? 2. Let us compare ourselves with the dying. (*John Collinson.*)

Ver. 21. So is a man to his praise.—The influence of applause :—The various passions implanted in human nature are necessary to animate the soul in the service of God and our generation. The poet sung, "Love of fame, the universal passion." The wise man beheld this principle in human nature; he saw the effect of praise upon mankind. The text is a rule, grounded upon the observable effect of it upon man; a refined rule for trial of our true moral character or religious state. It is, literally, "A fining-pot for silver and a furnace for gold; and a man to the mouth of his praise." The conduct of men, in regard to their praise, may be as sure a trial of their moral and religious character as the fining-pot is of silver and the furnace of gold. By praise we should understand, not the plaudits of individuals or of the multitude, spoken in a tone of sarcastic irony; nor that given by mistake, as when another's conduct is innocently ascribed to us, with the

praise of his commendable behaviour. By a man's praise we understand real, unfeigned praise, bestowed for actions or conduct commendable in the sight of men, useful to the community. Such praise answers valuable purposes. To observe how a man is to his praise is a matter of serious importance to every soul of man. His praise refines one man, renders him thankful to God for a good name among men. Praise to a righteous soul renders it seriously inquisitive, whether its conduct really deserves praise—the praise not of men, but of God also. Praise renders the righteous respectful to those who bestow it; and they become more diligent to improve in well-doing. Praise to a righteous man is a fiery trial, where he needs humility and sober thoughts. Praise bestowed on the ungodly man renders him vain, self-confident, and self-conceited. He becomes haughty and insolent. Jealous of his honour, he is impatient to hear another praised. Persons of this character become careless—regardless of the praise of God. The reason of the different effects of praise is the different state in the inner man of the heart. The reason of the different effects of the fining-pot and furnace upon metals is the different nature and quality of the metals cast into them. The natural improvement of this subject is to determine our moral and religious character by the effect which the praise of men has upon us. (*John Devotion, M.A.*) *Popularity the most trying test of character*:—Men, in ancient times as well as in modern, submit precious metals, such as silver and gold, to the test of the fire. Fire revealed their impurity, and made them appear in their true character. What fire is to these metals, Solomon says, popularity or applause is to man's character—it tests him. I. POPULARITY REVEALS THE VANITY OF THE PROUD MAN. How did Absalom appear in the blaze of popularity? (2 Sam. xxv. 22). How did Herod appear? Amidst the shouts of his flatterers he assumed to be a god. II. POPULARITY REVEALS THE HUMILITY OF A TRUE MAN. A true man shrinks from popular applause, and feels humbled amidst its shouts. Dr. Payson, a careful self-observer, mentions among his trials “well-meant but injudicious commendations.” “Every one here,” he writes to his mother, “whether friends or enemies, are conspiring to ruin me. Satan and my own heart, of course, will lend a hand, and if you join too, I fear all the cold water which Christ can throw upon my pride will not prevent it from breaking out in a destructive flame. As certainly as anybody flatters and caresses me, my Father has to scourge me for it, and an unspeakable mercy it is that He condescends to do it.” Popularity is indeed to character what the “fining-pot is for silver and the furnace for gold.” Few things in life show us the stuff of which men are made more than this. Little men court this fire, but cannot stand it. (*Homilist.*)

Ver. 23. Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds.—*Kindness to animals*:—We live in an age when great regard is paid to the comfort and well-being of every class of the community, and when efforts are made to promote the general happiness. When so much is being done to add to the happiness of the human family we should not be forgetful of the dumb animals, to which, for our comfort, we are so largely indebted. It is always a good sign of a man when he takes a kindly interest in the brutes. A man who can roughly treat a horse or a dog can never be one in whom his own family find much to love. The days are gone of cruel and disgusting sports, in which men found their pleasure in watching the sufferings of the lower creatures. But a good deal of pain is still caused through mere thoughtlessness. See Bible notices of animals. 1. The fact of their creation by God. They were brought upon the earth before man was, and have, by priority, a right to such comforts as it affords. 2. Their being named by Adam. This indicated his lordship over them, and the interest God would have him take in them. 3. When man had sinned, by the slaughter of innocent animals he was impressively taught, and continually reminded of, the only way of salvation. 4. In the time of the Flood the animals were carefully preserved. 5. In the Mosaic economy laws were enacted for the protection and well-being of the creatures. Many make the mistake of thinking that animals must be frightened into obedience. A kind and gentle treatment, as it is the most humane, is also the most successful. They are fond of being praised and encouraged: a kind word or affectionate stroke makes them wonderfully happy, and even the expression of countenance they learn to understand. Remember it is said of God, “With the merciful man Thou wilt show Thyself merciful.” His eye is upon us, and He will call us to account for every act of cruelty done to the creatures He has made. Strive, then, to be like Him in kindness and in gentleness. (*J. Thain Davidson, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

VER. 1. The wicked flee when no man pursueth : but the righteous are bold as a lion.—*Christian boldness* :—In all ages courage has been regarded as a mark of honour and magnanimity, and cowardice has been considered a proof of pusillanimity and baseness. There is something base in cowardice. There is something noble in courage. A name descriptive of a virtue ought never to be applied to what is equivocal or culpable. Yet such is the native dignity of courage, such the value it ever commands, that in its most suspicious forms it possesses a charm which is almost irresistible. On the other hand, it is not for Christian men to judge of timidity as the world judges. There is much that the world accounts cowardly which we regard as noble and magnanimous. The real coward is the slave of his fear, and mankind are right in branding cowardice as vile and contemptible. The brave man is tranquil, firm, concentrated. He is the real master of what belongs to him, because he is master of himself. The text charges cowardice upon sin, and claims for holiness the honours of courage. There is nothing more wonderful in man than the moral faculty which we call conscience. But it may be injured and weakened. There is even the possibility that it may be destroyed. Among the instruments of torture with which conscience afflicts the soul of the sinner is fear. Sin is immediately followed by fear—by the fear of detection, of exposure, of punishment. Under a sense of sin the bravest man becomes a coward. Sin is more especially followed by a fear at the Divine displeasure. Sin is a thing of darkness. It shuns the light. When a man has sinned, his chief care is, that his sin should not be known to others. This becomes a supreme fear. Even when the sinner has no reason to fear man at all, he is not free from feelings of terror. Conscience allows them no peace. They are restless, unsettled, miserable. Changing the picture, the text presents the righteous as “bold as a lion.” The courage of the lion, though by no means a certain thing, has passed into a proverb, and the highest degree of intrepidity is implied by this comparison. We must not forget to make the distinction between physical and moral timidity. There is a timidity which is strictly a bodily infirmity. Where there is uprightness of conduct there is no place for fear. He who has done nothing to be ashamed of cannot dread detection and exposure. He who acts from principle, who does what he does in the fear of God, will not be afraid of the consequences of his actions, because he is well assured that all those consequences are in the hands of the great Disposer. In the discharge of duty “the righteous are bold as a lion.” Theirs is not presumption, for they are trusting on Him who is infinite. It is not desperation, for they can rely on innumerable promises. They present a bold front to the enemy; they feel their superiority. But before Him with whom they have to do, their Father in heaven, there is nought of self-confidence. Trusting in God, they cannot fail. They may bid farewell to doubt and insecurity. Their foundation is a rock; their hope is sure and steadfast. (*J. G. Dowling, M.A.*) *Sources of courage* :—The two ingredients that go into the composition of a good soldier are courage and good conduct. Here cowardice and courage are resolved into their first principles. All mankind are distinguished, by their proper characters, into two sorts—wicked and righteous. The wicked are of such base and timorous spirits that they are ready to run away from the least shadow of danger; being haunted with an ill-boding mind, they flee before the spectres of their own fancies. Every wicked man is not actually a coward, for that contradicts experience. There is a sort of valour which naturally springs out of the very temper of men’s bodies, which is nothing else but a certain impetus, or brisk fermentation of the blood and spirits, and this is common to bad men as with good. By the term “righteous” the Scripture is wont to express all good men, because all instances of goodness are acts of righteousness, either to God, or to ourselves, or to our neighbours. Of this sort of men the proper character is “bold as a lion.” At least their righteousness tends to make them so. Illustrate this proposition: that wickedness naturally tends to dishearten and cowardize men, but righteousness and goodness to encourage and embolden them. The things which naturally contribute to make men courageous. 1. That they be free, and within their own command. 2. That they be well hardened to endure difficulties and inconveniences. 3. That they be well satisfied in the nature of their actions and undertakings. 4. That they have a hopeful prospect of being well seconded. 5. That they have a probable security of good success. 6. That they be borne up with the expectation of a glorious reward. All these causes of

courage are to be found in righteousness, and their direct contraries in a sinful and wicked course of life. (*John Scott.*) *Moral cowardice* :—This is a fact that may be accounted for on moral grounds. Conscience is the tormentor of the bad man. 1. Then the finest faculties of men may become terrible scourges. 2. Then no dependence is to be placed on the wicked in the time of danger. 3. Then the wicked are always making fools of themselves. 4. Then the wicked cannot bear the judgment of man; how can they endure the vengeance of God? 5. Then man may come to be regarded as the enemy of man. (*J. Parker, D.D.*) *The difference between the righteous and the wicked in respect of courage and confidence* :—Scarcely is there anything more consistent and regular in the course of natural productions than that fear and remorse are the offspring of guilt, and religious courage and undauntedness the attendants of integrity. The most striking instance may be found in the behaviour of our primitive parents. I. CONSIDER THIS CASE WITH RESPECT TO THE WICKED. 1. One reason why they are so liable to be alarmed and put into disorder is shame. Those who do evil wish to conceal their doings. Darkness is not only the principle from which evil deeds flow, but the proper region and retirement where they strive for ever to conceal them. 2. Another cause is fear. That fear gives wings to the transgressor is observed even to a proverb. They who sin can have no real peace or satisfaction of mind. Fear naturally arises from the apprehension of present or future ill. Some indeed there are who have so effectually dosed and qualified their consciences as to pass over a crime with as much indifference as they before committed it. But there is little tranquillity within, though outwardly they seem so airy and serene. II. HOW THE RIGHTEOUS MAN ACQUITS HIMSELF. The upright man wants no refuge: as he is free from guile and deceit, so he is frank and open in his whole conversation. His integrity is dearer to him than the most pompous acquisitions, and the security of his soul than the gain of the universe. Through the perverse opposition of a censorious and malignant world, the most circumspect cannot always escape spiteful usage. But, confident in God, the good man maintains his ground, stands upon his defence, and is no more to be stormed by assault than perverted by interest. Innocence is the best armour he can put on. Since the difference appears so considerable and important, it cannot be a matter of doubt to any one that calls himself rational to which side his choice ought to be determined. (*James Roe, M.A.*) *Frights and securities* :—1. What continual frights those are subject to that go on in wicked ways! Guilt in the conscience makes men a terror to themselves, so that they are ready to flee when no man pursueth; like one that absconds for debt, who thinks every one he meets a bailiff. Though they pretend to be easy, there are secret fears which haunt them wherever they go, so that they fear where no present or imminent danger is. Those that have made God their enemy, and know it, cannot but see the whole creation at war with them, and therefore can have no true enjoyment of themselves, no confidence, no courage, but a fearful looking for of judgment. Sin makes men cowards. 2. What a holy security and serenity of mind those enjoy who keep conscience void of offence, and so keep themselves in the love of God. In the greatest dangers the righteous have a God of almighty power to trust to. Whatever difficulties they meet with in the way of their duty, they are not daunted by them. (*Matthew Henry.*) *Lion-like boldness of the righteous* :—The righteous are those who do right. Saxon of righteous is “right wise.” Before man had fallen the righteous were those who were conformed, in all respects, to the known will of God. Now, as fallen creatures, none can claim to be righteous, according to the strict requirements of the law. Some, however, may be spoken of, in a comparative sense, as righteous. The eleventh article says, “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith.” A certain quality is ascribed to such persons: they are “bold as a lion.” This is a proverbial expression from ancient times. I. BOLDNESS IS INDISPENSABLE AT THE VERY BEGINNING OF THE CHRISTIAN COURSE. Does it require no boldness to obey the gospel call? Let those answer who have gone through with the painful struggle which it costs before the mind can be brought to a decided stand. II. BOLDNESS IS REQUIRED IN THE DISCHARGE OF THE DUTIES WHICH MUST BE MET DAY BY DAY. What bright examples of courage have been placed before us in the lives of the saints of God—Moses, Caleb and Joshua, David, Elijah, &c.; and in the history of the martyrs and confessors of the Church—e.g., Athanasius, Ridley, and Latimer. Those brave souls are now acting the same noble part who, in these days of blasphemy and rebuke, are not afraid to show favour to God’s children who may be under a cloud of reproach and trodden underfoot by the mighty. In more

ordinary matters, the same boldness is indispensable. **III THE BOLDNESS OF THE RIGHTEOUS IS MANIFESTED AT THE APPROACH OF DEATH.** There is something in human nature which instinctively shrinks back at the thought of dissolution. But when the righteous man actually draws near the border-line, the fear of death is gone. Then let us all cultivate the decision, the boldness, and the endurance, which our profession demands. (*John N. Norton.*) *Conscience* :—Pursuit and flight are in nature correlatives, and constitute an inseparable pair. A swift foot does not avail the man who is fleeing from himself. When they escape from man, God is the pursuer of the guilty. A reflector fixed in the human constitution points ever to its author, as the magnet points to its pole, whatever the windings of life may be. In effect, God is present in every human breast. Conscience within a man is one extremity of an electric wire whose other extremity is fastened to the judgment-seat. This apparatus brings the Judge and the criminal terribly near to each other. Conscience is in many respects the most wonderful element in the constitution of man. It is the point of closest contact and most intimate communion between us and the Father of our spirits. Thereby chiefly God apprehends us, thereby chiefly we apprehend God. Who shall settle the controversy between an unclean conscience and a just God? The question points, as John did, to the Lamb of God who taketh sin away. There is one Mediator between God and man. Terrors are sent as messages of mercy to arouse loiterers, and compel them to flee. It is better to be roughly awakened to safety than to perish asleep. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*)

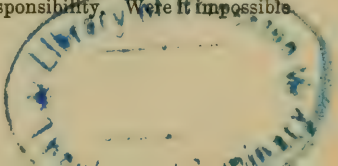
Ver. 6. Better is the poor that walketh in his uprightness, than he that is perverse in his ways, though he be rich.—*Christianity, the health of a people.*—The poor man who walks in his integrity, must be supposed to possess that practical wisdom so much spoken of in this book. The rich man who is perverse in his ways is destitute of this wisdom. The presumed difference between the poor man and the rich is in the possession of true religious principle. **I. THE INFLUENCE WHICH TRUE RELIGION EXERTS IN REFERENCE TO THE DUTIES OF LIFE.** There has been a tendency to speak of useful knowledge as if it did not include religious knowledge. Useful knowledge must be that which equips man for immortality. If a man is imbued with the fear of God, he has a principle which must accompany him into all the intercourse of life, and exert an influence over each portion of his conduct. **II. THE INFLUENCE WHICH TRUE RELIGION EXERTS IN REFERENCE TO THE TRIALS OF LIFE.** The poor cottager finds in the promises of Scripture a mighty counterpoise to all the troubles by which he is oppressed. Christianity does not diminish labour or prevent sorrow or death, but it does give strength, and cheer, and hope. Religion has such a power of softening what is rugged, enlightening what is dark, sustaining under the heaviest pressure, and encouraging in the most perplexed circumstances, that as nothing can supply its place, so its possession more than compensates every other want. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*)

Ver. 8. He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.—*Dishonesty.*—A matter-of-fact Englishman, writing about the uselessness of abstract preaching, says that, during ten years' residence in a country parish, he became well acquainted with the characteristic temptations, failings, tricks and vices, and crimes of the people, and he longed to hear something from the pulpit calculated to meet the emergencies of the case. Ten long years the drowsy pulpit poured forth its dull platitudes; the clergyman never coming down from the clouds long enough to let the dishonest, the cruel, and the dissipated understand that they know nothing practically concerning the imitation of Christ until they have asked themselves how He would have acted if He had vegetables to sell or horses to drive. Wealth, in days of undefined English, meant well-being, and is now used to describe money—money more than all beside; and worth, or worthiness, has degenerated into a term to express how much of "filthy lucre" that one has contrived to get hold of. The cool contempt of money which some old cynics and philosophers expressed was little more than affectation. Had they been lucky enough to have any, their estimate of it might have been different. A man of wealth, who behaves himself properly, and puts on no airs, is as much to be respected as his poorest neighbours. Let this be remembered, however, it must be wealth honestly come by. When greed of gain has secured a lodgment in the heart, it imperiously demands satisfaction. In countries where civilisation is unknown it turns freebooter, and leagues with bands of kindred spirits; while in Christian lands it puts on more respectable

shapes, not so shocking to the casual observer. The rude robber stops his victim on the highway, and holds midnight revels on the spoil; and the cunning accountant defrauds his creditors, and rides in his carriage. Does a just God see much difference between them? Christian integrity will, in the end, always receive its merited reward. Instead of worldly maxims, based on low and unworthy principles, let the solemn question of our Lord keep us from evil ways—"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (*John N. Norton.*) *Usury*:—Usury is here to be understood of every description of oppressive, unrighteous, and rigorous exaction. The providence of a just and merciful God is evidently here referred to. That providence transfers wealth from the hand of grasping and griping selfishness to that of humanity and generous kindness, to that of the man who "pities the poor." Men may not mark the Divine hand in occurrences of this kind; and it is always a delicate matter for us—one to which we are hardly equal—to interpret providence judicially. But there are cases at times in which the transference is so striking that it would be impiety not to see and own God in it. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*)

Ver. 9. He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination.—*The prayer of the disobedient.*—The duty of rendering his best obedience to the Divine precepts is one which man has perpetually been called to recognise, under both dispensations. Man, as a fallen being, with alienated affections, debased tendencies, and distorted views, required precise directions as to his future course. The Divine claims to obedience were in no way relaxed; but the power of exhibiting that obedience, and even an adequate knowledge of its requirements, were wanting. If we are dependent creatures—unable to support ourselves, it is manifestly the part of wisdom to secure the continual support of Him who has promised that the rays of His favour shall evermore be reflected on His followers. Be careful to take a sufficiently comprehensive view of the demands thus made upon you. You are not to imagine that by scrupulous attention to one department of Christian duty you may obtain a virtual absolution for the neglect of another. It is not through the regular use of words of supplication or thanksgiving that everything can be accomplished. In what spirit have they prostrated themselves before the Divine footstool? Has it been with the sincere resolution of striving, in all time to come, to do the will of their Father which is in heaven? Has it been with the determination of henceforward applying themselves with all diligence to ascertain and observe His sacred statutes? The reason for not receiving gracious answers to prayer may be that the heart has never been surrendered to God; there has been a lamentable and utter absence of true faith and love. The object of the inspired writer, in our text, is to set forth, in the most striking point of view, the heinousness and dire consequences of neglecting practically to honour the Divine statutes. There are those who, while with their lips they show forth God's praise, are yet stately and deliberately neglecting some duty, indulging in some sin, pursuing some course of which the "end is death." If you would profit by His clemency, you must strive to obey His laws. If you would obtain His blessings, you must zealously and perseveringly devote yourselves to His service. (*Hugh B. Moffat, M.A.*) *Conditions of communion with God*:—1. It is by the Word of God and prayer that our communion with God is kept up. God speaks to us by His law, and expects we should hear Him and heed Him; we speak to Him by prayer, to which we wait for an answer of peace. 2. If God's Word be not regarded by us, our prayers shall not only not be acceptable to God, but they shall be an abomination to Him; not only our sacrifices, which were ceremonial appointments, but even our prayers, which are moral duties, and which, when they are put up by the upright, are so much His delight. The sinner whose prayers God is thus angry at is one who wilfully and obstinately refuses to obey God's commandments, who will not so much as give them the hearing, but causes his ear to decline the law, and refuses when God calls. God will therefore justly refuse him when he calls. (*Matthew Henry.*)

Ver. 10. Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit.—*Opposite characters and opposite destinies*:—1. Here are the OPPOSITE CHARACTERS—the perverse and the upright. 1. Notice the perverse. Who are the perverse? "Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way." Two things are observable here. (1) A sad possibility that the righteous should "go astray." This possibility is implied in moral responsibility. Were it impossible



for the righteous to go astray, they would be mere machines, not moral agents; there would be no virtue in their obedience, no guilt in their transgression. Moral beings are like planets, bound ever to roll in the orbits in which they were first placed, and move with the same speed and regularity; they can bound into another, and move at what rate they please. This possibility is demonstrated in facts. Righteous angels have fallen. Righteous men have fallen (Adam, Lot, David, Peter). This possibility is assumed in the appeals of Scripture. (2) An infernal attempt. The attempt is to "cause the righteous to go astray." Wicked men are constantly making the attempt in a thousand different ways. By suggesting doubts as to the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, the truth of the Bible, &c., &c.; and by insidious but potent appeals to those elements of depravity which linger to a greater or less degree in the souls of even the best men to the end of life. Society abounds with tempters. 2. The upright. The upright here stand in contrast to those who tempt the righteous to go astray. Who are the upright? The men of incorruptible truth, inflexible rectitude; the men, in one word, who "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God." Job was an upright man, one that feared God and eschewed evil. II. OPPOSITE DESTINIES. 1. The destiny of the one is self-ruin. "Shall fall himself into his own pit." 2. The destiny of the other is a blessed inheritance. "The upright shall have good things in possession." (*Homilist*.)

Ver. 13. He that covereth his sins shall not prosper : but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.—*The danger of covering our sins*.—I. THE DANGER. 1. In respect of God. Sin cannot be covered, cannot admit of excuse. So far as sin may be covered or excused, so far it is not sin, at least not liable to punishment. Notice the difference betwixt moral and commercial laws. Ceremonies are arbitrary; laws, as a rule of life, are real and eternal. Those sins which break moral laws receive no cover or palliation. To imagine that God will admit of excuse for the breach of such law as is eternal were to turn His justice into iniquity, and His wisdom into folly. The two attributes of God, His wisdom and His power, are the highest attributes which He hath. God is more jealous of His wisdom than of His power. He that committeth sin dallieth with His power; but he that covereth and pallieth sin playeth with His wisdom. God forgiveth the greatest sins when they are laid open and confessed, but casteth an angry look and layeth a heavy hand upon those sins which would hide and cover themselves with excuses. What a dangerous thing it is to study to cover a sin! "That must needs be the greatest sin which maketh every sin greater." In denial and concealment, though we deny the fact, yet we acknowledge it to be evil. 2. In respect of ourselves. There is no sin to which our nature more strongly inclineth us than this of covering and excusing our sin. It is the very nature of sin, not only to infect the soul, but to bewitch it, that it shall either not feel it or not be willing to evaporate and expel it. Though God hath set up a tribunal in our hearts, and made every man a judge of his own actions, yet there is no tribunal on earth so much corrupted and swayed from its power and jurisdiction as this. No man is so well pleased with any cheat as that which he putteth upon himself. Our conscience checketh us, and we silence it; sin appeareth, and we cover it. This covering of sin is more natural than any sin beside. We cannot name any that agreeth with all natures and complexions as this doth. Excuse, as a servant, waiteth upon all, and is officious to offer attendance on the foulest. God hath imprinted upon man a natural shame of sin. God left this impression of shame upon us to keep us within compass, that we should not commit sin. But, too often, what was made as a means to prevent sin is made a cloak to cover it. Shame is a good buckler to oppose against sin. II. THE REMEDY. Penitential confession reaching even to the mercy-seat. Sin is never less deformed in the eye of God than when it is in its own shape. Sin is never more sin, hath never more in it, than when it is covered. He that confesseth his sin hath found a plaster for it. (*A. Farindon, B.D.*) *Covering sins*.—Men's sins are often well known, when they flatter themselves that they are unknown, and the attempt to conceal deceives none but themselves. Sin is in itself too odious to appear without some disguise, and most men wish to be thought better than they are; but the policy is both weak and dangerous. To attempt to hide our sins from the eye of God is atheistical and vain. The mantle of Divine love is sufficient to cover all iniquity, and the interposing blood of atonement to secure from the inflictions of eternal wrath. There is also a love among brethren which covers

a multitude of sins, and forms an amiable part of the Christian character. A truly good man will be tender towards every one's failings but his own. The charity we exercise towards others is, however, very different from those excuses which we are too apt to form for ourselves. I. WHO ARE THEY WHO MAY BE SAID TO COVER THEIR SINS? 1. Those who endeavour to conceal themselves under falsehood, as did the servant of Elisha. 2. Those who palliate and excuse themselves in sin, by endeavouring to shift the blame on others, belong to the same class. 3. The attempt to dissemble and disguise sin, by specious pretences, is another way of covering it. 4. There are some who even justify and plead for sin, and these certainly can need but little disguise. 5. Sin is sometimes covered by vain and ineffectual endeavour to satisfy and atone for it. II. CONSIDER THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF EVERY FALSE DISGUISE. "Shall not prosper." 1. His hopes shall be disappointed, and the end he had in view defeated. It is of no use to deny, to palliate, or in any other way to hide our sins, for God hath set them all in the light of His countenance. 2. Artifice and disguise shall not prosper, even as to our temporal interests. 3. Those who indulge in any manner of deceit shall be utter strangers to spiritual prosperity. Sin is the distemper of the soul; and covering it with false disguises only tends to increase the evil, and make it more dangerous. 4. A course of dissimulation will end in utter ruin and despair. God will neither be deceived nor mocked. Learn—(1) How carefully we should avoid what will be attended with such tremendous consequences. (2) As we are not to cover our own sins, so neither should we cover the sins of others, any farther than prudence directs or Christian charity allows. (3) That we may not be tempted to use any other coverings, let us seek after those which are recommended to us in the gospel. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *Covering sin*.—Certain great iron castings have been ordered for a railway-bridge. The thickness has been calculated according to the extent of the span and the weight of the load. The contractor constructs his moulds according to the specification, and when all is ready, pours in the molten metal. In the process of casting, through some defect in the mould, portions of air lurk in the heart of the iron, and cavities like those of a honey-comb are formed in the interior of the beam; but all defects are hid, and flaws are effectually concealed. The artisan has covered his fault, but he will not prosper. As soon as it is subjected to a strain the beam gives way. Sin covered becomes a rotten hollow in a human soul, and when the strain comes the false gives way. (*W. Arnot, D.D.*) *A false covering and a safe refuge*.—I. THE FALSE AND DECEPTIVE REFUGE. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." 1. This is the course which men usually adopt when they enter on a course of sin. They are conscious that they are doing wrong, and they try to cover and conceal what they are doing. They resort to a variety of expedients. Some flatly deny them. Others cover their sins by evasion, or they shift the blame off upon others. Some plead their weakness, and the circumstances in which they were placed. Many plead the practice of others. It is the custom of the trade. The vilest class attempt to cover their sins by glorying in them. 2. Note the folly of such conduct. Such a man shall not succeed in the attempt to cover his sins. And he shall not escape from the consequences of his sins, however he attempts to conceal them. Sin brings its own punishments to the man who commits it. II. THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY WHICH IS HERE COMMENDED. 1. The condition of forgiveness. We must confess our sins. We must forsake them. 2. These conditions are not the only ground of forgiveness. In God there is not only provision made for forgiveness, but also for our help to resist sin, and escape from it. (*A. Clark.*) *The consequences of covering sin*.—I. IN REFERENCE TO OTHERS. He who covers sin is a hypocrite, who always wears a mask. He conceals bad principles under an avowed zeal for good ones; bad purposes under a noisy reprobation of such purposes; and a bad system of iniquity under the mask of extraordinary purity and piety. II. IN REFERENCE TO OURSELVES. Man possesses the astonishing, but awful power of practising deceit upon himself, and concealing his sins from his own view. This he does—1. By decreasing their number. This is done by rejecting the Divine law as the standard, and by adopting as the standard the lax notions of worldly and irreligious men. 2. By diminishing their enmity. This is done by pleading the impetuosity of the passions; the strength of temptation; as a set-off against bad works the multitude of good ones. But he who hides his sins from others shall not eventually prosper. And he who hides his sins from himself cannot prosper. Now, consider the nature and advantage of confessing and forsaking sin. 1. Our confession must be spiritual. 2. Our sin must be

confessed as a great evil. 3. Our sin must be confessed as deserving special punishment. From hence we learn that the prospect of those who cover their sins, either from themselves or others, is most appalling; that no sinner, however guilty, and depraved, and miserable, need despair, for he may yet be saved. (*Sketches of Four Hundred Sermons.*) *Sin covered or confessed*.—I. COVERED SIN AND NO PROSPERITY. 1. What is the meaning of covering sin? 2. How do men cover sin? (1) By palliation. (2) By dissembling. (3) By practising sin in secret. (4) By self-righteousness. 3. Covered sin a failure. "Shall not prosper." This does not refer to temporal, but spiritual prosperity. This is not an arbitrary arrangement. The same power by which night and day succeed each other has promulgated, and will enforce the law that says, "Bad lives, unpardoned, shall be punished." Sin cannot be successfully cloaked, but will be discovered and punished. II. CONFESSED AND FORSAKEN SIN AND MERCY. 1. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them." Prompt confession, followed by prompt forgiveness. Confession involving forsaking. Profession attended with consistent practice. The reform of the outward life, and the healing of the soul. 2. "Shall have mercy." This is not a subject of doubt. It was the experience of the psalmist (Psa. xxxii. 5). The apostle believed and taught it (Rom. iv. 5). John has put it beyond speculation (1 John i. 8, 9). Mercy is yours if you will fulfil the conditions. (*J. E. Hargreaves.*) *Man's treatment of his own sins*.—1. All men have sins. 2. All men have something to do with their sins. 3. All men deal with their sins either foolishly or wisely. I. THE FOOLISH TREATMENT OF OUR SINS. "He that covereth his sins." 1. By denying them. Thus Cain, Rachel, Joseph's brethren, Peter, Ananias and Sapphira, endeavoured to hide their sin. 2. By extenuating them. Men plead excuses. 3. By forgetting them. They endeavour to sweep them from the memory by revelry, by sensuality, worldliness, and intemperance. Sins must reveal themselves sooner or later. II. THE WISE TREATMENT OF OUR SINS. "Whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." (*D. Thomas, D.D.*) *A serious contrast*.—I. MAN'S COVERING, AND ITS FAILURE. There are many ways in which men try to cover their sins. Excuse-making is the commonest trade under heaven. Some cover by secrecy and some by falsehood. Some think their sin has been hidden away by lapse of time. II. GOD'S COVERING, AND ITS SUCCESS. By the atoning sacrifice which was presented by the Lord Jesus. Before God covers sins He unveils them. The covering is as broad as the sin; it completely covers, and for ever covers. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 14. *Happy is the man that feareth alway.*—*The happiness of fearing alway*.—He who sincerely confesses and forsakes his sins will be afraid of sin for the future, having felt the smart of it. I. WHAT IS THE FEAR THAT MEN OUGHT TO MAINTAIN ALWAY? It is a fear of God for Himself, and a fear of other things for God, or in reference to Him. We ought to entertain—1. A filial and reverential fear of God. Slavish fear will never make a man happy. Slavish fear is mixed with hatred of God; filial fear with love to Him. 2. We must entertain a fear of jealousy over ourselves. 3. A fear of caution and circumspection. This makes a man walk warily. II. SOME THINGS IN RELATION TO WHICH WE SHOULD ENTERTAIN THIS HOLY FEAR. 1. With respect to himself. Happy is the man who keeps a jealous eye over himself. Be jealous over your principles, your hearts, your tongues, and your senses. 2. With respect to our lusts and corruptions. He is happy who can say he fears nothing so much as sin. Fear the sin of your nature; sins by which you have been formerly led astray. These forsaken lovers will again make suit to you, and will get in upon you, if you grow secure. Fear little sins. There is no sin really little, but many most dangerous ones that are little in man's esteem. 3. With respect to our graces. Grace is a gift to be stirred up. It is in hazard of decay, though not of death. The way to keep the treasure is to fear. 4. With respect to our duties. The whole worship and service of God is called fear; so necessary is our fear in approaching Him. 5. With respect to our attainments. They are in hazard of being lost. III. THE NECESSARY QUALIFICATION OF THIS DUTY. "Alway." This fear must be our habitual and constant work. This fear should season all we do, and be with us at all times, cases, conditions, places, and companies. Because—1. We have always the enemy within our walls. While a body of sin remains within us, temptations will always be presenting themselves. 2. Because there are snares for us in all places and in all circumstances. There are snares in our lawful enjoyments; snares at home, in the field, waking, and at table. Many ditches are in our way, and many of these

are so concealed that we may fall completely into them before we are aware. At all times we are beset. IV. THE ADVANTAGE ATTENDING THIS DUTY. "Happy." For—1. This prevents much sin, and advanceth holiness of heart and life. He that fears to offend God is most likely to keep His way. 2. It prevents strokes from the Lord's hand. Where sin dines judgment will sup. Holy fear prevents falls. 3. This fear carries the soul out of itself to the Lord Jesus Christ, the fountain of light, life, and strength. Improvement: (1) You who are in a joyful frame, join trembling with your mirth. (2) You that are in a mourning frame, fear away. (3) You that have not met with Christ; what shall I say to you? Fear lest your sharing in Christian privileges leave your affections more deadened, and your consciences more seared. To all of you I say, "Fear away." (T. Boston, D.D.) *A holy fear*:—What is this Bible-enjoined fearing? It is not the paralysis of terror, the shrinking and subsiding into nothingness of the craven spirit within. It is the ballast of the soul. Calm cautiousness. It is our Scotch maxim, "Ca' canny!" Retrospective, introspective, perspective, circum-spective. Nervousness of experience, caution, cannyness of reflection, the fearing here embodies. I. THE ACTION. "Feareth." It is evangelical fear, for only the gospel can bring it. It is three-faced. The first outlook of it is towards God. The fear of God is not that turbulent tornado of terror that tears up and destroys; it is the gentle fall of the summer rain on the thirsty soil; it is the soft dew-descent of the Holy Ghost; it is the fear of God for himself. It is the holy hush in His almighty presence, the calm instinct of regeneration that gives sympathetic dignity to the soul. It is the "strength of the Lord." Another outlook of this fear is towards yourself. Your worst enemy is your next-door neighbour, and on his gate is your own name. He is yourself. To draw illustration from mining, your heart is full of inflammable gas. Sin fills every chink, and it is all ready for the tempting flame. Another outlook of this fear is towards your surroundings. Look up, look in, but also look round. The world is an intertwined network of devildom. Take care, beware! II. THE TIME FOR THIS ACTION. The longest day has a nightfall. In this activity of the soul no swinging bell heralds a release; without a break or gap the night-shift succeeds to day, and the day-shift to night, and the same worker is in both. "Happy is the man that feareth away." At all times, in all circumstances, in all companies, you are in danger of going to the bottom. Always fearing is always safe. III. THE CONSEQUENCE OF IT. "Happy is the man." Because for time and eternity he is ready. It is never waste of wind or time to keep to the path, even though it wind and wind like an eternal corkscrew. He is happy because this fear saves him from the fear of man. That fear ever bringeth a snare. The Christian filled with the gospel fear of God is happy, too, because it empties the soul. You and I are unblessed to-day because we are too full. (John Robertson.) *The happy influence of fear*:—He is not an unhappy man whose heart is continually governed by this fear. It has a happy influence upon his soul, to guard it from the temptations of Satan and the world, and to keep it close to the Redeemer. It tends not to obstruct but to promote the exercise of faith and hope and joy in the Lord. Thus fear is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and a blessed means of establishing the heart in the love of God. It is a happy sign of an interest in the everlasting covenant of mercy, and in that special favour of God which is the source of all our joys. But wretched is the man who is not afraid to sin against his Maker and Judge. His heart is hard as the nether millstone. (George Lawson, D.D.) *Holy fear*:—Holy fear is a searching the camp that there be no enemy within our bosom to betray us, and seeing that all be fast and sure. For I see many leaky vessels fair before the wind, and professors who take their conversion upon trust, and they go on securely, and see not the under water till a storm sink them. (H. G. Salter.) **But he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.**—*Hardening the heart*:—The whole system of moral and religious duty is expressed as the "fear of God." The religion which makes fear the great principle of action, implicitly condemns all self-confidence, all presumptuous security; and enjoins a constant state of vigilance and caution, a perpetual distrust of our own hearts, a full conviction of our natural weakness, and an earnest solicitude for Divine assistance. I. WHAT HE IS TO FEAR, WHOSE FEAR WILL MAKE HIM HAPPY. The primary object of fear is sin. The dread of sin produces the dread of temptation. The continual recurrence of temptation and the imbecility of nature make many doubtful of the possibility of salvation. In fear many have fled from possibilities of temptation into deserts and monasteries. But this is not the worthy way of meeting fear. And in cloisters men do not

escape from themselves. True fear is a constant sense of the Divine presence, and dread of the Divine displeasure. True fear inspires prayer. II. **WHAT IS MEANT BY HARDNESS OF HEART.** Hardness of heart is a thoughtless neglect of the Divine law: such an acquiescence in the pleasures of sense, and such delight in the pride of life, as leaves no place in the mind for meditation on higher things. To such men Providence is seldom wholly inattentive. They are often called to the remembrance of their Creator, both by blessings and afflictions; by recoveries from sickness, by deliverances from danger, by loss of friends, and by miscarriage of transactions. As these calls are neglected, the hardness is increased, and there is danger lest He whom they have refused to hear should call them no more. This state of dereliction is the highest degree of misery. III. **HOW, OR BY WHAT CAUSES, THE HEART IS HARDENED.** The most dangerous hardness proceeds from some enormous wickedness, of which the criminal dreads the recollection, and finding a temporal ease in negligence and forgetfulness, by degrees confirms himself in stubborn impenitence. A less dangerous hardness consists, not in the perversion of the will, but in the alienation of the thoughts: by such hearts God is not defied; He is only forgotten. Of this forgetfulness the general causes are worldly cares and sensual pleasures. Such men are usually either stupidly or profanely negligent of these external duties of religion, which are instituted to excite and preserve the fear of God. A great part of them whose hearts are thus hardened may justly impute that insensibility to the violation of the Sabbath. Many enjoyments, innocent in themselves, may become dangerous by too much frequency. Whatever tends to diminish the fear of God, or abate the tenderness of conscience, must be diligently avoided. IV. **THE CONSEQUENCE OF HARDNESS OF HEART.** "Shall fall into mischief"—both into wickedness and misery. He that hardeneth his heart shall surely become both wicked and miserable. (*S. Johnson, LL.D.*)

Vers. 20, 22. **He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent.**—*Haste to be rich*:—Nowhere does the Bible denounce riches. It tells men very plainly what the dangers are. It denounces very strongly the conduct of rich men. But the motive to good conduct, in the Old Testament period, was the promise of secular prosperity—abundance. The Bible asserts that riches are a great blessing; and poverty a great misfortune. It is the method of God's development and education of the race to bring men up to higher levels by those processes by which men develop larger means, various riches, and the comforts of life, and give to the household broader foundations, ampler powers. It goes against the educated religious feeling of men for one to say that the way of riches was meant to be the way of religion; yet it is true. All barbarous nations are poor. The Bible speaks the sentiment of universal mankind when it regards riches held in the hand of virtue as being an eminent blessing from God. I. **RICHES MAY EITHER BE PRODUCED OR COLLECTED.** The foundation of all prosperity is production. He increases the riches of a society that applies his reason and skill to the raw material of the globe, or that brings it from inertness to positive service, and gives to matter the power of serving man. He produces wealth. Then comes the man who utilises it; creates it into garments, houses, utensils, &c. The foundation of all value is not what a thing costs in making it, but what is inherent in it of thought and skill. What part of man was used in producing it; and to what part of a man is such properly addressed? The man who produces wealth is the foundation man. It is the law of the production of wealth that a man should render an equivalent for every stage of value. Sudden wealth is not hasty wealth, necessarily. II. **THE PRODUCTION OF WEALTH CONNECTS ITSELF WITH BENEVOLENCE, WITH SYMPATHY.** The man who is developing property, as distinguished from money, is actually increasing the common wealth. It is a sad thing, but in the main true, that the producers of wealth are obliged to eat up the larger part of their product in order to have strength to work. But every man that is developing or producing riches is, at the same time, educating himself in morals, or should be. Patience is a moral quality; another name for self-control. The man who gets wealth legitimately is usually himself built up in inward riches fully as much as he builds up his estate in outward wealth. III. **HASTE TO BE RICH IS A GREAT DANGER TO MEN, BECAUSE IT TEMPTS THEM TO EMPLOY ILLEGITIMATE MEANS.** Sleights, crafts, disingenuous ways, greed, violations of honesty. Haste runs along the edge of so many dangers, that a man's head must be peculiarly well set on his shoulders, and his brain must be very solid and sober, if he does not topple over into them. A

man that is making haste to be rich is tempted to ostentation. But ostentation is expensive, and men are easily tempted to devise schemes to maintain it. Men having sudden wealth are apt to become cruel through indifference to other men's rights. Haste is apt to change into idolatry. (*H. W. Beecher.*)

Ver. 23. He that rebuketh a man.—*Reproof*.—I. REGARD REPROOF AS A DUTY. 1. Speaking generally, we may be bound to administer reproof out of regard to the individuals to whom we may address ourselves. An obligation rests upon us to love our neighbours as ourselves. This obligation requires us, of course, to study to promote their welfare. If we saw a man thoughtlessly going near the heel of a horse that was likely to kick at him, and to imperil his life, we should instinctively caution him to avoid the danger. If we knew a friend about to take in hand a business which, from our knowledge and experience, we were quite sure would prove his ruin, we should certainly give him the benefit of our opinion. Much more, therefore, when we see him doing anything or neglecting to do anything to the injury of his character, his usefulness, his happiness, or his eternal well-being, shall we go and faithfully acquaint him with our opinion of his conduct. 2. Another reason why we should give reproof may be the regard we have, not simply to the individuals to whom we may address ourselves, but to the interests of society. 3. There is only one other reason which we would touch upon—we mean, the mind of God upon the matter, as it is revealed in Holy Scripture (Lev. xix. 17). Let us now notice some particular classes of persons upon whom this duty devolves. (1) First, upon ministers. (2) The same duty rests upon masters. They are monarchs in the small kingdom of the household, and are bound to see that nothing is allowed therein that is in any way to be condemned. (3) It rests also upon parents. II. THE SPIRIT AND MANNER IN WHICH REPROOF OUGHT TO BE ADMINISTERED. 1. It should be given in a spirit of prayer. There are differences of natural constitution, and differences of natural judgment, which may affect a person's fitness to discharge the duty; but no man ought to set about such a work without lifting up his heart to God, that his words may be uttered with wisdom, that the opening of his lips may be with grace. 2. A spirit of love ought, also, to influence us. We should be most watchful lest a feeling of anger, wrath, or malice should prompt us, and the hatred of the offence should be lost in the indulgence of our ill-temper and pride. 3. Our reproof, also, should vary in its mode, according to the disposition of the person to be reproofed. 4. Reproofs, though deserved, should be administered with a sparing hand. Incessant finding fault defeats its own end. It only irritates the reproofed. 5. In rebuking, take care not to overstate the fault. The offender is generally prejudiced in his own favour. He will be apt to think that even a fair statement is excessive; much more will he detect injustice, if he be unfairly charged. III. THE EFFECTS WHICH REPROOF IS CALCULATED TO PRODUCE. It should produce, of course, always the fruit of righteousness. The life of the reproofed ought to be amended; the good advice ought to be taken in a thankful and obedient spirit. This is not unfrequently the case, but oftentimes it is the contrary. 1. Some men are scornful, and obstinately wicked. It is likely to prove discouraging, to use no stronger word, to attempt to bring them out of their faults and errors. There is little good to be got by reproving the confirmed sinner. Your reward will be, probably, that he will hatch up some slanderous report to blacken or blot your character. 2. We may indulge a hope, however, although this be so in bad and extreme cases, that a happier consequence may oftentimes be looked for. This our text encourages us to expect. It is written, "He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with his tongue." Even men who are wise and good may be irritated, annoyed, and for a season be offended with us; but, when the disturbance in the atmosphere shall have subsided, it shall be more clear and healthy than it was before. The man's good-sense, assisted or produced by the Holy Spirit of God will triumph over his passion; and he will feel no disposition to complain of the bitter medicine that was administered to him. The reproof which has been given him will send him to his knees. It will lead him to pray that he may see his errors, and that he may have grace to overcome them. (*T. W. Thompson, M.A.*)

Ver. 26. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.—*The folly of trusting in our own hearts*.—I. WHAT IS MEANT BY A MAN TRUSTING HIS HEART. It is—1. To commit and resign up the entire conduct of his life and actions to the directions of it, as

of a guide. A guide should be able to lead and direct him; and a guide should faithfully give the best directions. II. WHEREIN THE FOOLISHNESS OF IT CONSISTS. Two things render a trust foolish. 1. The thing which we commit to a trust. We commit three things to the mercy of this trust—the honour of God; our own felicity here; the eternal concerns of our soul hereafter. The honour of God as Creator, Governor, Saviour, and gracious Father; our happiness in this world, both temporal and spiritual. Is the heart worthy of such trust? Nay, it is weak, and so cannot make good a trust. In point of apprehension, it cannot perceive and understand certainly what is good. In point of election, it cannot choose and embrace it. Moreover, it is deceitful, and so will not make good a trust. The delusions of the heart relate to the commission of sin; the performance of duty; a man's conversion or change of his spiritual estate. The heart of man will draw him on to sin by persuading him he can keep it in bounds; by leading him into occasions of sin; by lessening and extenuating it in his esteem. A man's heart will persuade him that a cessation from sin is a plenary conquest and mortification of sin. (*R. South.*) *Strange self-deception*:—By what sophistry, what perversity of the understanding, what negligence it is, that the tremendous prospect of eternity and judgment has really so little to do with the formation of our opinions, and the regulation of our conduct. Two propositions may be established by this inquiry. 1. From the deficient practice of those calling themselves Christians, we are by no means justified in the inference that their judgments are not therefore convinced of the truth of the doctrines they profess to believe. 2. If, in defiance of incalculable hopes and terrors of another world, man is still unable to keep that guard over the inclinations of his heart which may secure his innocence, the entire removal of so potent a check could surely have no other tendency than to complete the degradation of his nature, and to dislocate the whole fabric of society. With regard to the question before us—1. Although the highest achievement of a course of moral and religious discipline be, to subject our every thought and action to the control of conscience and religion only, yet in every stage short of this highest exaltation of character it is to far inferior impulses that even our most plausible actions owe their birth. In his natural state passion, not principle, forms the mainspring of action. As moral education advances, impulses ripen into knowledge. Where he once only felt, he now reasons. But it will be long ere his original constitution will change its bias. In this intermediate state of moral improvement our conviction may indeed be sincere, but our conduct will still be defective. With the greater part of mankind action almost invariably outruns reflection. If the want of union between reason and appetite be the first source of sin, our amendment must depend upon establishing their connection. One cause of that strange indifference on the subject of religion manifested by many may be traced to that callousness of mind, that apathy arising from satiety, which all of us have felt when our minds for a long period together have been occupied with one predominant idea, however originally interesting. The only remedy we can apply is still the same calculating and systematic counteraction produced by habitual meditation and discipline which we have already recommended. A last inducement to sin is that natural tendency of our constitution, whether intellectual or physical, to adapt itself to the medium in which it is placed, and to vary its own habits and propensities and feelings according to the accidental association of external circumstances. (*P. N. Siuttleworth, D.D.*) *The height of folly*:—Let me ask you to look at the closing clause of the previous verse, for it appears to me to have a very immediate relation to our text. "He that putteth his trust in the Lord shall be made fat. He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." On the one hand is Jehovah, all strong, all wise; and on the other one's evilly disposed, vacillating heart. In whom dost thou trust? Those who trust Jehovah become fat and flourishing; He honours their faith, He prospers the work of their hands; but leanness of soul and lack of real blessing must be the result of trusting to one's inner consciousness, or past experience, or anything of self. I. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," BECAUSE OF THE DIVINE VERDICT ON THE HUMAN HEART. It is not as though we were left to our own estimate of the natural heart. If we were, since it is natural to us to think well of ourselves, we could hardly be called fools for trusting in these hearts of ours. We have a higher verdict; One who knows, far better than we can, has published the innate character of the human heart. We need not be in ignorance as to what God thinks of us. He is the authority on this matter. He made the heart. True, He did not make it sinful or foolish; He made it pure and holy, prepared for every good word and work. But, knowing as He does how beautiful it was at the outset,

He can best judge of the marring of it. He knows, too, that the more beautiful and glorious it was at first, the greater is its wreck and ruin. We are aware of the fact that those things which are most finely constructed, when they do suffer damage suffer very materially. The wreck is all the greater, and repair is more difficult because of the delicacy of construction. Well, God knew how pure the human heart was made, what capabilities it possessed, what possibilities lay latent there. He knows, too, the damage sin has done. God does not look upon the fall as a slight accident which could be easily remedied. What does He say of the human heart as it is, by reason of its sin? He says, "Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Moreover, God in another place has plainly written, "The heart of men is fully set in them to do evil." Have you forgotten that striking word from Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"? Well may we say, with the writer of this proverb, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," for he is trusting a deceiver; nay, he is trusting the arch-deceiver, the very chief among the deceivers. Are you going to trust in this heart of yours? Your feelings, your capabilities, your faculties—everything that you like to include in this comprehensive word, are all affected, more or less, by the fall, and yet you are prepared to trust in this rotten reed, this broken staff. When I hear some excuse themselves or their fellows by saying, "Oh, well you know, but they are good at heart," I feel like saying, "Wherever else they are good, they are not good there, for God Himself declares, 'There is none righteous, no, not one.'" So, then, we have got God's verdict concerning the human heart, and it is so emphatic, and so unflattering, that we say with the author of the proverb, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

II. Secondly, EXPERIENCE WARNS US IN THE SAME DIRECTION. We can see for ourselves, if we open our eyes, that those who trust their own hearts are fools. Should we not learn lessons from the falls and follies of others? Let me ask you who have been vigilant, Have you noticed the result of self-confidence in others? Whether it be in business matters, or social affairs, or political questions, or spiritual concerns, to what has unbounded self-confidence led men? They may have run well for awhile. It proved to be only a nine-day's wonder. It was as the crackling of thorns under a pot: there was great flare and flame, but it ended in smoke and ashes. I have met with instances, not a few, in which men have thus overrun themselves, and become filled with their own ways. It seems to me as if a Nemesis followed them. God virtually says to them, "Well, you believe in yourself; I will leave you to yourself; you trust your own heart, you can do without Me; you ask for independence—you shall have it." These men have not succeeded—they have come to grief; their supposed righteousness and self-merit did not provide them with shelter in the day of storm; it was a refuge of lies. Are you going to follow their example? Are you likely to succeed where they have failed? Such matters are influenced by certain inexorable laws. A Nemesis pursues those who proudly trust their native strength. Besides, you have had some experience of your own, have you not? Is there anybody here who has not had a try at trusting his own heart? III. I must point out to you that SELF-TRUST IS QUITE UNNECESSARY. I can conceive that, if we were shut up to trusting our own hearts, we might be excused for doing it. God knows we must trust somebody or something! Is there not in us all the clinging tendency, a desire to get hold of somebody or something, a craving for sympathy? If there were no outside helper, stronger than ourselves, what else could we rely on but our experiences and our feelings? But there is something else infinitely better to trust to. We have no excuse for such folly as this; we are not shut up to self-confidence; there is an alternative. If I saw one on the shore launching a leaky boat upon a troubled sea, I should say to him, "Fool that thou art, to go to sea in such a sieve as that!" "Well, but," says he, "I must go to sea, necessity is laid upon me—and there is no boat but this." In that case I could only pity him: if he must embark, what can the poor fellow do but take his chance in the leaky cockleshell? Ah, but this is not our case at all. You must go to sea, and it is stormy, too, but you need not embark in this leaky craft of your own heart. God's own lifeboat stands alongside you; nay, it is already launched. You have but to leap into it; it will outride the roughest sea, and weather every storm. I do not know how it is that some people will not trust God till they are obliged to. You who have not yet got rid of sin and of its condemnation, why not trust Jehovah? Why not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved? I know you are trusting to your own heart. You say to yourself, "I do not think it is so bad after all. Sometimes it is really first-rate." Another says, "Well, my heart is not up to the mark, I know,

but it is better than it was!" Well, really, friend, I am glad to hear that; but when it is at its best it is, by no means, reliable. I pray you do not say, "I think it will come all right at last." It is folly thus to talk. Look away to Jesus; trust not your own heart, but in the living God. And you, who have been brought out of darkness into His marvellous light, surely you are not going to play the fool by trusting your own heart. You, you of all men, ought to know better. You are going back to where you were at first, to self-righteousness, and self-trust! Well, I leave this question with you; are you able, despite all the experience you have had, to steer your craft across life's trackless sea, and how can you hope to outride the breakers of judgment that break upon the further shore? (*Thomas Spurgeon.*)

Folly of self-confidence.—I. THE EVIL THE TEXT REFERS TO. The heart here signifies the whole soul. Trusting in it means to rest on its sufficiency; to depend upon it in the various circumstances in which we may be placed. It includes—1. A reliance upon our own wisdom in the concerns of life. 2. To adopt our own schemes of religion. By affirming the sufficiency of nature and reason. By admitting into his creed nothing but what his imperfect mind can understand. By placing all his hopes on excited feelings and warm emotions. By adding to, or diminishing from, Christ's holy doctrines, ordinances, or commands. 3. To confide in the moral goodness of our own hearts. The Christian also trusts in his own heart when—4. He relies upon his own skill or power in temptation and trouble. II. THE

DECLARATION MADE CONCERNING THIS EVIL. "Is a fool." This is obvious—1. If we appeal to reason. 2. To the heart itself. 3. To examples. 4. To our own experience.

(*J. Burns, D.D.*) *Self-sufficiency and godly confidence*.—I. SELF-SUFFICIENCY. Seen as pride, and as self-trust. Two things indicated. It is mischievous. It is foolish. II. GODLY CONFIDENCE. Trust in God implies a knowledge of Him, an appreciation of His transcendent excellences, and a consciousness of His willingness and ability to sustain us. This trust leads to prosperity. (*Homilist.*)

The folly of self-trust.—1. This maxim is justified by the description which Jeremiah gives: "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" For if it be indeed such as it is there represented, assuredly the heart cannot be trustworthy. And that the prophet's description is but too correct must appear abundantly evident to all who have ever sincerely and seriously engaged in the difficult task of self-examination. The very difficulty of the task proves how full the heart which is the subject of it must be of treachery and of secret vice. 2. This maxim is also abundantly justified and confirmed by universal experience, and may be illustrated experimentally. 1. One striking proof we have

IN OUR PRONENESS TO RELAPSE INTO SINS OF WHICH WE FANCED, PERHAPS, THAT WE HAD LONG AGO FAIRLY REPENTED. He makes at once his prompt yet firm choice between God and the world. But soon his evil heart of unbelief tempts him again to depart from the living God. II. Another practical and experimental proof of the wise man's assertion we have in THE VARIOUS TURNS OF THE BELIEVER'S STRUGGLE WITH INDWELLING SIN. III. We pass from the Christian's continual struggle with the sin that dwelleth in him to THE RESOLUTE STAND WHICH HE IS CALLED UPON TO MAKE AGAINST THE EVIL THAT IS IN THE WORLD. Confessing that our corrupt inclinations still long for certain forbidden indulgences, we yet heedlessly loiter still within sight and within reach of the glittering prize, though we feel our longing becoming daily more intense, and our power to resist it daily giving way. IV. One other instance of this folly we may mention: OUR PRONENESS TO RELY ON THE AMOUNT OF OUR ATTAINMENTS,

THE SUFFICIENCY AND THE STABILITY OF OUR OWN CONSCIOUS AND CONFIRMED INTEGRITY. We easily forget the imperfection which adheres to our best services and our best qualities, and please ourselves with the idea that some one favourite Christian virtue, at least, is now strong enough for any emergency. And from the very instant in which such an idea begins to prevail between us, that particular virtue may be pronounced the feeblest and most precarious of all that we have. A slight change of circumstances—some very trifling accident, unforeseen and unexpected—a new temptation suddenly assailing us—may lay the proud structure in the dust,

and teach us how vain it is to trust in any degree of excellence, in any height of Christian perfection. (*R. S. Candlish, D.D.*) *Self-deceit*.—Whosoever trusts his own heart as his light, adviser, and guide, in the complex ways and actings of life, is a fool. Half the wisdom of the wise is in the choice of their advisers. Wise men discern wisdom in others, and call them to council; the wisest man is he who least trusts himself alone. He knows the difficulties of life and its intricacies, and gathers all the lights he can and casts them upon his own case. He must in the end act on his own responsibility; but he seeks all counsellors, the experienced and

impartial, sometimes the opposed and unfriendly, that he may be aware on all sides; for "in the multitude of counsellors is safety." But it may be asked, Is not the heart God's creation and God's gift? Did He not plant eyes in it, and give to it light and discernment to guide our ways? Is it not our truest personal guide, given to each one of us by God Himself? Why must a man who trusts his own heart be a fool? 1. Because our hearts—that is, we ourselves—are ignorant of ourselves. If we knew ourselves, we should not trust ourselves; we do so because we do not know what we are. We are by nature, and still more by personal act, sinners. And sin blinds the heart: so that the more sinful the less it knows its sinfulness; for like death, which is most evidently perceived by the living, not at all by the dead, and by the dying only in the measure in which their living consciousness is still retained, so it is with sin dwelling in us. Where is the worldly man who in matters of honour and dishonour, right and wrong, sin and duty, wisdom and folly, religion and faith, death and judgment, heaven and hell, does not with confident assurance trust his own heart? But in the sight of God such a man is a "fool." 2. Not only is the heart ignorant of itself, but it deceives itself. Of course these cannot be altogether separated. Every one who is ignorant is, in one sense, a self-deceiver; and yet it may not be with any laboured illusion. Ignorance is absence of light; self-deceivers have light, and visions in that light; but those visions are illusions. Ignorance is the danger of unawakened minds; self-deceit of the awakened. (1) What is more common than to see men characteristically marked by one sin which they pointedly censure in others, and from which they believe themselves to be absolutely free? These unsuspected sins are almost universally the faults of childhood and early youth, which have become habitual and unconscious; for instance, personal vanity, selfishness, a difficult and disputatious temper, impatience, resentment, unreality, or the like. And they who have these faults in them by long habit generally excuse themselves by ascribing the same to others on whom they have inflicted them; as if the wind should chide the roughness of the sea for disturbing its repose, all the while believing itself to be at rest. (2) The same effect which appears in casual temptations is more dangerously produced in deliberate motives and lines of conduct. An early habit of personal vanity, or desire of wealth, sometimes unconsciously governs a person's whole life. The same is true of worse passions, such as jealousy, envy, resentment, &c. (3) The gravest part still remains; I mean the deceit we practise upon ourselves as to our state before God. The same unconsciousness which conceals from us our habitual sins, such as anger or envy, conceals also the impatience and stiffness of our will towards God, and our want of gratitude and love, our undevotion and sluggishness in the spiritual life. All these, having been upon us from our earliest memory, have become our natural, our normal state. Such a heart becomes, at last swathed in its own self-trust; and we watch it as we do the rash motions of a man who walks blindfold, reeling in the midst of dangers, which might sometimes for a moment provoke our mirth, if it did not always excite alarm. 2. Another reason why to trust our own hearts is a note of folly is because they flatter us. How long have we gone on persuading ourselves that we are meek, poor in spirit, makers of peace, merciful, patient, and the like, because we assent in desire and will to the Beatitudes, and would fain share in their benedictions! How long have we persuaded ourselves that we pray both often and enough, earnestly, and with devotion; that we love God above all, and above all desire so to love Him; that our life is, on the whole, not unlike the great Example of humility; and that we know our own hearts better than any one can tell us! And yet what does this last persuasion show? Why are we so sensitive under a reproof? Why do we accuse ourselves freely of all faults but the one imputed? Why are we never guilty in the point suspected? Why do we wholly guide ourselves, and feel so great security in our own direction? but because we trust our own hearts. Out of this proceeds our visions of devotion, our imaginations of sanctity. It is a forge never cold, always at work, forming and fashioning devices which please us by their fair and shapely forms, and flatter us because they are a homage to ourselves. Lessons: 1. The greatest security against deceiving ourselves by trusting our own hearts is a careful information of conscience. But this plainly runs beyond the period of our responsibility into the account of those to whom our childhood was subject. Our chief difficulty is in the attempt to analyse the confused and hardened mass of self, neglected for twenty, thirty, half a hundred years; to unravel a world of knots and entanglements; to find the beginning of the clue. Self-examination begun late in life must remand the chief part of its discoveries to the day of

judgment. 2. The other security is the only one which remains to those who have never enjoyed the first; and that is to take the judgment of some other person, instead of trusting in themselves. It will be, no doubt, painful and distressing; it will bring shame and burning of face. But is not the stake worth the cost? (*Archdeacon Manning.*)

CHAPTER XXIX.

VER. 1. He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck.—*The doom of the incorrigible sinner*:—This proverb may be accommodated to all the affairs of life. In whatever course a man blunders on, headstrong and regardless of advice and admonition, it will ruin him at last, as far as the matter is capable of working his ruin. But here principal reference is to religion. Often reproved—this is undoubtedly our character. Reproved by men from all quarters. The Word of God has reproved us. God has reproved us by His providence in private and public calamities. God has reproved us more immediately by His Spirit. We have also been our own monitors. Conscience has often pronounced our doom. Even the irrational creatures and infernal spirits may have been our monitors. Solomon assumes that a man may be often reproved, and yet harden his neck; that is, obstinately refuse submission and reformation. Nothing but a sullen and senseless beast can represent the stupid, unreasonable conduct of that man who hardens himself in sin, against the strongest dissuasion and reproofs from God and His creatures. The stiff neck that will not bend to the yoke of obedience must be broken, and its own stiffness renders it the more easily broken. It may harden itself into insensibility under reproof, but it cannot harden itself into insensibility under Divine judgments. He shall be suddenly destroyed. Sudden ruin is aggravated because it strikes a man into a consternation. There is dreadful reason to fear that you will always continue in your present condition if you persist in being proof against all admonition. (*S. Davies, M.A.*) *The duty of reprovers and persons reproved*:—The verse may be read, "He that reproveth another, and hardeneth his own neck." The Hebrew is, "A man of reproofs, that hardens his own neck." 1. Such a reprover of sin does it against his office. The office of a reprover binds him to be blameless. 2. Such a reprover can never reprove to a right end. It is not because he hates sin; if he did he would put it away from himself. 3. Such a reprover can never do it in a right manner. As long as a man has a beam in his own eye he cannot rightly deal with the mote in his brother's. 4. Such a reprover is a hypocrite. 5. Such a reprover is inexcusable. His reproving another man's sin makes himself inexcusable of his own. 6. Such a reprover is an absurd and impudent person. Such a man both wrongs his own soul and dishonours God. But the verse may be read, "He that, being often reproved, hardeneth his neck." Hebrew is, "Hardeneth his own neck." A "man of reproofs" equals a man often reproved. The Lord does not destroy a man nakedly, but upon consideration of sin. What a great sin it is, what a great ill it is, for a man to sin against his reproofs. The greatness of the ill is set down in two ways. 1. By the great sinfulness of the thing. It is called the hardening of a man's own neck. 2. By the greatness of the punishment that God inflicts upon this sin. When God reproves a man of sin, the reproof primarily comes out of love. The end of reproof is to bring a man to good, to reduce him into a right way, to convert a man, and save his soul. There is no reason in the world why reproof should be taken otherwise than with all willingness and thankfulness and cheerfulness. First use of this: See here what an infinite punishment God is bringing upon a kingdom when He is taking away reprovers from them. The second use makes against those that despise the reproof of the wise. "Ye despise not men, but God." The Lord proportions punishments to men's sins. 1. Because hereby a man's punishment appears to be so much the more equal and worthy. 2. Because this stops a man's mouth; it convinceth a man's conscience. 3. All the standers-by see the equity of it. Consider and see how God proportions punishments to sins in kind, quantity, quality, time, and place. (*William Fenner.*) *The certain doom of the impenitent*:—I. THE TRUE IDEA OF REPROOF. Whatever is calculated in its own nature or relations to arrest the attention of the mind, and call men to see

their neglect of duty, or the obligation they owe to God, involves the true idea of reproof. II. THE WAYS IN WHICH GOD ADMINISTERS REPROOF. God exercises a universal providence. By judgments God oftentimes administers reproof. The Holy Spirit reproves by convincing the sinner of his sins and producing in his mind visitations of remorse. III. THE DESIGN OF REPROOF. To effect a reformation. He means to secure this end by forbearance. When He finds that will not do, then He uses the rod. IV. THE MEANING OF HARDENING THE NECK. The figure is that of a bullock working with a yoke upon his neck. The neck becomes callous with the pressure of the yoke. Men are represented as pushing against God's providence, and thus making their necks hard. The conscience of the sinner becomes quite callous under reproof if he does not yield to it. V. THE MEANING OF BEING SUDDENLY DESTROYED. Opposition and destruction will always go together. The conscience becomes so stupefied that men lose the sense of danger. The danger of men is great, just in proportion as they cease to be affected by a sense of it; when men feel the most secure, if they are living in sin, then destruction is most certain; and when it comes it will be sudden, because they do not expect it at all. This is not arbitrary on the part of God; it is a natural consequence of the sinner's conduct. (*C. G. Finney.*) *Hardening perilous*.—I. A CASE SUPPOSED. 1. You have often been reproved by kind and judicious parents. 2. Or by some faithful friend who has seen your tendency to evil, and has stepped in to prevent the destruction which he saw was on its way. 3. A still larger class among us God has counselled and reproved by His ministering servants. 4. Many have been reproved by afflictions of various kinds. II. THE SEVERE JUDGMENT HERE DENOUNCED. The threat of the text is only against those who persevere in iniquity amidst all their religious privileges, who will not be warned nor instructed, who reject all advice and admonition, all offers of grace and mercy. Reflect on the suddenness, the greatness, and the eternity of the destruction which awaits impenitent offenders. But we only preach destruction that we may make you feel your need of salvation; and then, when we have awakened your fears, how gladly do we point you to the refuge and the remedy. (*S. Bridge, M.A.*) *A solemn warning*.—I. GOD'S LINGERING LONG-SUFFERING. He reproves. Why? That we may turn and live. He reproves often. Why? Because "He is not willing that any should perish." II. MAN'S INSANE INFATUATION. "Hardeneth his neck." Too many "reject the Word of the Lord." 1. How terrible the power of sin! 2. How deceitful the heart of man! 3. How inexcusable and suicidal the sinner! III. THE TERRIBLE THREATENING. God's long-suffering will not always last. 1. "The sinner shall be destroyed; his destruction is certain." 2. Be destroyed; his destruction fearful. 3. Shall suddenly; we know not what a day may bring forth. IV. THE AWFUL APPENDIX. "And that without remedy." There is a remedy here and now, however sinful we have been, but there will be none hereafter. (*David Jamison, B.A.*) *Often reproved*.—I. THE CHARACTER IMPLIED. II. THE REPROOF GIVEN. "Often reproved." III. THE REPROOF REJECTED. "Hardeneth his neck." Setteth himself against taking the reproof, as a stubborn ox against taking the yoke. Indifferent to it. Laughs at it. Becomes worse. Obstinate in doing evil and in resisting good. "Mind your own business." "I am my own master." Throws off all restraint. Becomes sceptical, perhaps atheistic; scorns at religion and religious people. IV. THE PUNISHMENT THREATENED. "Shall suddenly," &c. He shall be cut off from hope; from friends; from honour; from happiness; from all his desirable possessions—suddenly; prematurely cut off; unexpectedly; apoplexy; disaster in travelling, &c. Irrecoverable; eternal. Conclusion: 1. A limit to God's long-suffering. 2. To live against Divine reproofs is perilous. 3. Divine reproofs are Divine mercies. 4. Exhort sinners. (*John Bate.*)

Ver. 2. *When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice.*—*The happiness of the people*.—Man is, for the most part, equally unhappy when subjected, without redress, to the passions of another, or left, without control, to the dominion of his own. Government is necessary to the safety of particular men and the happiness of society. The people cannot rejoice except the righteous are in authority. I. THE DUTY OF THOSE IN AUTHORITY TO PROMOTE THE HAPPINESS OF THE PEOPLE. No man is born merely for his own sake, to consult his own advantage or pleasure, and unconnected with the good of others. This is more evidently true of those who are exalted into high rank, dignified with honours, and vested with authority. He who wears the honours and receives the revenues of an exalted

station, without attending to the duties of his post, is, in a very high degree, criminal, both in the eye of God and man. II. BY WHAT MEANS THE HAPPINESS OF THE PEOPLE MAY BE MOST EFFECTUALLY PROMOTED. The only uniform and perpetual cause of public happiness is public virtue. Without virtue nothing can be securely possessed or properly enjoyed. In a country like ours the great demand is for the security of property, the confirmation of liberty, and the extension of commerce. If riches and liberty could make us happy, it would remain to be considered how riches and liberty can be secured. Human laws must be limited in their effects. The deficiencies in civil life can be supplied only by religion. The first duty of a governor is therefore to diffuse through the community a spirit of religion. To this end it is necessary that the external order of religion be diligently maintained, that the solemnities of worship be duly observed, and a proper reverence preserved for the times and places appropriated to piety. And governors must co-operate with their laws by their own examples. III. HOW THE PEOPLE ARE TO ASSIST AND FURTHER THE ENDEAVOURS OF THEIR GOVERNORS. Nations cannot be governed but by their own consent. The first duty of subjects is obedience to the laws. No man thinks laws unnecessary for others; and no man, if he considers his own inherent frailty, can justly think them unnecessary for himself. Even the errors and deficiencies of authority must be treated with respect. All institutions are defective by their nature, and all rulers have their imperfections, like other men. As government is difficult to be administered, so it is difficult to be understood; and where very few have capacity to judge, very few have a right to censure. The laws will be easily obeyed by him who adds to human sanctions the obligations of conscience; and he will not easily be disposed to censure his superiors whom religion has made acquainted with his own failings. (*John Taylor.*) *A righteous government:—*
 I. SOME OF THE CHIEF ADVANTAGES THAT PEOPLE ENJOY UNDER A RIGHTEOUS GOVERNMENT. 1. The laws are duly executed. This keeps all the springs of the body politic in their right tone, and gives life and vigour to their motion. 2. True merit finds protection and encouragement under it. This enlivens people's spirits and makes them study to be serviceable upon a right principle. 3. Such a government appears abroad with weight and authority. Righteousness exalteth a nation and spreads its fame and reputation in countries far remote. 4. Such a government is attended with the blessing of God. II. HOW OUGHT PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR JOY WHEN THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN AUTHORITY? 1. By a ready and cheerful obedience to authority. 2. By grateful acknowledgments to God for so great a blessing. 3. The people should express their joy by their gratitude to such rulers. (*Bp. John Hough.*)

Ver. 5. A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet.—
Flattery.—I. WHAT FLATTERY IS. The nature and property of it is to put on all forms and shapes, according to the exigence of the occasion. He that would paint flattery must draw a picture of all colours, and frame a universal face, indifferent to any particular aspect whatever. It shows itself—1. In concealing or dissembling of the defects and vices of any person. It will pretend not to see faults, and if it does, it will be sure not to reprove them. All people are not called to reprove others. (1) Who are they that are concerned to speak in this case? Such as are entrusted with the government of others. Those who are entrusted with the guidance and direction of others. Those that profess friendship. (2) In what spirit are these reprehensions to be managed? Let the reproof, if possible, be given in secret. Let it be managed with due respect to and distinction of the condition of the person that is to be reproved. Let him that reproveth a vice do it with words of meekness and consideration; without superciliousness or spiritual arrogance. A reproof should not be continued or repeated after amendment of that which occasioned the reproof. 2. In praising or defending the defects or vices of any person. If to persuade men out of the acknowledgment of the evil and unlawfulness of their actions be flattery, then none are so deeply chargeable with flattery as these two sorts of men—such as, upon principles of enthusiasm, assure persons of eminence and high place that those transgressions of the Divine law are allowable in them that are absolutely prohibited and condemned in others, and the Roman casuists, who have made it their greatest study to put a new face upon sin. This kind of flattery is of very easy effect, by reason of the nature of man, and the nature of vice itself. From these two considerations we may easily gather how open the hearts of most men lie, to drink in the fawning suggestions of any sycophant that shall endeavour to relieve their disturbed consciences by gilding their villainies with the

name of virtues. 3. In imitating any one's defects or vices. Actions are much more considerable than words or discourses. To any generous and free spirit it is really a very nauseous and fulsome thing to see some prostitute their tongues and their judgments, by saying as others say, commending what they commend, and framing themselves to any absurd gesture or motion that they observe in them. Every kind of imitation speaks the person that imitates him inferior to whom he imitates, as the copy is to the original. 4. An overvaluing those virtues and perfections that are really laudable in any person. This is more modest and tolerable, there being some groundwork of desert. II. THE GROUNDS AND OCCASIONS OF FLATTERY. 1. Greatness of place and condition. Men consider the great danger of speaking freely to great persons what they are not willing to hear. It may enrage, and make them mortal enemies. 2. An angry, passionate disposition. This also frights and deters men from doing the office of friends, in a faithful reprehension. 3. A proud and vainglorious disposition. To tell a proud person of his faults is to tell infallibility that it is in an error, and to spy out something amiss in perfection. III. THE ENDS AND DESIGNS OF IT ON HIS PART THAT FLATTERS. Every flatterer is actuated and influenced by these two grand purposes—to serve himself, and to undermine him whom he flatters, and thereby to effect his ruin. For he deceives him, and grossly abuses and perverts his judgment, which should be the guide and director of all his actions. He that is thoroughly deceived is in the very next disposition to be ruined; for cast but a mist before a man's eyes, and whither may you not lead him? And he undermines, and perhaps in the issue ruins, him whom he flatters, by bringing him to shame and a general contempt. Moreover, by his flattery and its consequences, he renders his recovery and amendment impossible. Every fault in a man shuts the door upon virtue, but flattery is the thing that seals it. (*R. South.*) *The tendency of flattery*:—In this verse Solomon does not refer solely to the intention of the flatterer; he refers also to the tendency of the flattery. The latter may be far from harmless, even although to a greater degree the former may. Injury may be done, and many a time is done, when no harm is meant to the party, and when there is no interest of our own to serve. And there is no little guilt on the part of those who, seeing vanity to be a man's failing, set themselves on purpose to feed it, pouring into the ear, merely in the way of an amusing experiment, every description of fulsome adulation, trying how much and in what variety it will be taken in. (*R. Wardlaw, D.D.*) *Flattery*:—The weakness of the human heart exposeth it to innumerable dangers. Constant attention is necessary to preserve it secure, because it is often assailed on the most unsuspected side. The conceit and vanity, which all men have in some degree, renders truth itself often dangerous. It is the prerogative of God alone to receive praise without danger. He hears, and is pleased to hear, the endless hymns of His angels. He hears the voice of praise ascending from all nature: the infinite variety of beings celebrating Him as the great, the just, the merciful God. He receives those truths without prejudice to His holiness; because, being in Himself essentially holy and true, these attributes can never jar, nor harm each other. It is far otherwise with us: unstable ourselves as water, our very virtues partake of this instability; whence ariseth the necessity of our suspecting everything that flatters us, because there is nothing in general more seductive and deceitful; and of all delusions, there is none more shameful and pernicious than that which, by the suggestions of self-love, makes us take falsehood for truth, and think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. People tell us what we ought to be rather than what we are, and we, by a pitiable blindness of running into the snare that is spread for us, believe ourselves to be indeed what adulation represents us. In this manner it often happens that a man who is naturally modest, and who would be humble if he knew himself, intoxicated with this vain incense, thinks himself possessed of merits which he never possessed; thanks God for graces which God never gave him; acknowledgeth the reception of talents which he never received; ascribes to himself successes which he never had; and enjoys himself secretly, while he is openly despised. Some learned men have very plausibly ascribed the origin of those idolatrous superstitions that prevailed so long in the world to that inclination which men have of believing what is advantageous, however incredible it may really be. Certain men were told that they were gods; and, by often hearing this told them, they became accustomed to be honoured and treated as gods. Those who first held that language to them knew very well that it was false; yet, from a spirit of flattery, they performed every action that they would otherwise have done from a spirit of sincerity had they been convinced that what they spoke was true. We

dare not say that this error is entirely destroyed even by Christianity: vestiges of it remain everywhere, and a species of idolatry is established by the custom of the world. We tell the rich and the great no more that they are gods, but we tell them that they are not as other men are; that they want those weaknesses which others have, and possess those qualities which others want: we separate them so from the rest of mankind that, forgetting what they are, they think themselves gods; not considering that their admirers are interested persons, determined to please them, or rather determined to deceive them. Nor may we confine ourselves to the great and powerful ones of the world to justify this observation: the idolatry I speak of reigns equally in the lower conditions, and produceth there proportionable effects. Thus a woman is idolised by interested and designing men, till she knows herself no more; and, though marked with a thousand faults and imperfections, yet thinks of correcting none of them; believing herself a subject every way accomplished, the joy and admiration of the whole world, because such phrases are constantly employed for her seduction and ruin. The contradiction is, that in the midst of all this, those men, so vain and so passionate for glory, never cease to protest that the thing they abhor most is to be deceived; in the meantime they wish to be praised, flattered, and admired, as if flattery and delusion could possibly be separated. What resolution, then, can we take to avoid these errors? We must resolve to distrust even truth, when it seems to flatter us; because there is no appearance of truth which approacheth so near to falsehood, and consequently, there is none so much exposed to the dangers of falsehood. Jesus Christ Himself, who, according to the Scripture, was the firm and immovable Rock, to whom the praises of the universe were due, as the tribute of His supreme grandeur and adorable perfections, yet while on earth would not suffer those truths which made for His honour and glory. He wrought wonders; He cured the blind and the deaf; He raised the dead; yet when the people began to celebrate His name for this, and to cry that He was the prophet of God, He enjoined them silence, and seemed upon the whole extremely impatient of applause. (*A. Macdonald.*) *Flattery a web*:—I. VARIOUSLY WROUGHT. Woven of many threads, and of various hues. Some are coarse as a rope, others as fine as a gossamer web; all are suited to the character of the prey to be caught. II. WIDELY SPREAD. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. *Scornful men bring a city into a snare.*—*The snares of the metropolis*:—As residents in London we ask, Is there as much wickedness here as in other great cities? Are there snares and temptations of a peculiar character, and highly dangerous to the rising youth of the age? 1. One of the snares is the spirit of the world—the spirit of competition and a low tone of moral feeling. 2. Irreligious habits. 3. Irreligious associates; such as the young man who is not conscientious in the discharge of his ordinary duties; the young man who is devoted to pleasure. 4. Late hours. This leads to neglect of prayer. And the late hour is the hour of sin. 5. Lewd women. This snare involves great moral debasement, the prostration of all intellectual power, and the annihilation of all benevolent and elevated feeling. And to this specific form other vices will adhere. (*R. Ainslie.*)

Ver. 15. *The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame.*—*A neglected education, the parent's dishonour*:—I. LOOK AT THE CHILD LEFT TO HIMSELF. That is, without reproof, and that grave advice which gives wisdom. The original term is applied to the unbridled impetuosity of an animal. The child, if not held in by the bit and bridle of a religious education—if left to the impetuosity of his own passions—will be ruined. Appeal to the nature of things. What is there left to itself that comes to any good? What is land without inclosure and cultivation? Appeal to experience as to the effect of a neglected education. Who are the pests of society? Appeal to Scripture. II. THE EFFECT OF THIS NEGLECT. Look at the parent. "Bringeth his mother to shame." This is only one result. Other things follow. Ruin to the child's principles. All the consequences of his conduct to a neighbourhood. Tendencies to sap the foundations of morality and justice between man and man. In all this there seems to be a remarkable feature of the retributive justice of God in His moral government. The education of children in the fear of God is one of the first and self-evident duties, the foundation of all moral good. But it is implied that a child carefully trained for God and religion shall not bring his mother to shame. III. THE MOTIVES FLOWING FROM THESE CONSIDERATIONS. 1. Enforce this duty on our own hearts. 2. See it in reference to the children of the poor. 3. The

need of guarding children against the evil influence of the press. Show what religion you possess by your endeavours to educate your children religiously. (*Daniel Wilson, M.A.*) *A child neglected, a parent's disgrace* :—I. THE AFFECTING OBJECT : “A child left to himself.” Allusion is probably intended to the natural impetuosity of a horse. 1. A child left without religious instruction. Parents are enjoined to “train up a child in the way he should go” : not the way he would go. Education must have its foundation in Scripture. The spirit of the age requires that parental instructions should be of a decidedly Scriptural character. The work of instilling Divine truth must be commenced early. Train them to early habits of industry, to diligent reading of the Scriptures, and to constant prayer. 2. A child left without fervent prayer. Do you know the way to a throne of grace, and can you forget the child of your affections? If you do not pray for him it is not likely that you will pray with him. 3. A child left without a good example. Children understand actions better than words. The parent who, by his ungodly example, betrays the confidence of his child by leading him in the way of sin when he should guide him in the paths of piety and peace is guilty of a species of cruelty difficult to be described. 4. A child left to himself is one without salutary restraint. Instruction should be enforced by authority. If you lose your influence, the child will assume it and rule you, when you should govern him. In compelling obedience the happy medium should be observed between too much harshness on the one hand and too great laxity on the other. Eli does not appear to have failed either in instruction or example, but he is censured for withholding restraint. Let there be energy of character, efficient discipline, the tenderness of love blended with firmness of decision, and there will seldom be a necessity for adopting any painful or severe measures. II. THE PARENT'S DISGRACE. The duties and responsibilities of parents are mutual. It must, however, be admitted that a mother's influence is more powerful, her appeals more touching, her access to the heart more easy. But how many parents have passed days of sorrow and nights of sleeplessness in consequence of the misconduct of their offspring! Much of your future happiness is in the hands of your children. Look at the nature of things. A field without cultivation would speedily be overgrown by noxious weeds. Appeal to experience. Who are the Sabbath-breakers, the drunkards, the lawless and disobedient, the scoffers at Divine things? Are they not the persons who, in their childhood and youth, were left to themselves? Examine facts. David was brought to shame by Absalom and Adonijah. Hophni and Phineas brought Eli to shame. 1. A word of expostulation. You are leaving your children to themselves because you have never felt the value of your own soul. Think of your own comfort. Think of your country's welfare. Think of the approbation of heaven. 2. A word of exhortation. Your danger is great. Repent and believe the gospel. 3. A word of encouragement. The Christian parent has much to animate him in the conscientious discharge of his duty. All the promises of God, the experience of the past, and the hope of the future encourage his affectionate endeavours to train up his children in the fear of the Lord. He must not, however, expect harvest in spring. (*James Cottle, B.A.*) *The importance of early discipline* :—If we have conscientiously performed any particular duty, no failure in the object to which it has been directed can inflict disgrace. We may do our part, and do it well, but we cannot command success by our best contrivances and our utmost diligence. It is not every child who is trained up in the way he should go that walks in that way. In such cases, deplorable as they are, no disgrace attaches to the parent, the instructor, the guardian. It is when the duty imposed by God and enforced by natural feelings has been neglected that the ignorant, the vicious, or the worldly character becomes the just reproach upon those to whom it is in that case justly to be ascribed. “A child left to himself.” How many ideas of compassion are suggested by these words! A child, however carefully nourished and guarded, left to himself in regard to his soul, his intellect, his tempers, habits, and character, is no uncommon case. A child left to himself is a child untaught. For them to be grounded in the languages, informed in history, and embellished with every usual branch of knowledge and accomplishment is not enough. To know God alone is life eternal. Too often children are practically left to themselves to gather their notions of religion from the opinions around them and the current literature of the day. They ought to have been trained from childhood to know the Holy Scriptures; they should have been taught their ruined state, the love of God in the gift of His Son, and the love of Christ in giving Himself to the death upon the Cross. The child untaught is often undisciplined and unrestrained. The twig which might have been bent

becomes firm as the gnarled oak. Habits of self-will, habits of self-gratification, habits of idleness perhaps, prepare for everything that is bad. When a child has been thus left to himself what can be expected but vice, want of honourable principle, a character passionate, headstrong, reckless? It cannot be a surprise that, in such a case, disgrace is thrown back upon the parents. The parent and the child are allied as long as recollection can associate them, and honour or dishonour they reflect, and cannot but reflect, upon each other. If parents neglect the soil and suffer it to be overrun with weeds what can they expect to be the harvest? The shame and discredit that come will be shared by both parents, but the feeling is fastened upon the heart of the mother in a manner and degree which are peculiarly severe. This is partly the case because so much depends on a mother's care, and partly because of the keener sensibilities of her sex. To the mother her domestic scene is the whole world. The shame which comes upon her as the punishment of neglected duty gathers intensity by its perpetual concentration of the reflection. Let me urge upon you as parents to encounter your arduous and responsible duty with the firm resolve that you will, heaven's grace assisting you, vigorously discharge it. They are beings to eternity, and for eternity it is your duty to prepare them. (*T. Kennion, M.A.*) *Leaving children to themselves*:—"Left to himself" means "left alone, with nobody to mind him and take notice of what he does." This, however, does not seem to have been the meaning of the author of the proverb. Hebrew writers, in their poetry, would sometimes bring two thoughts together, meaning nearly the same, only expressed in different words. Sometimes they would bring two thoughts together, the meaning of which is exactly opposite. This is the thing we have in the text before us. The words "rod and reproof" are intended to be opposite to the words "a child left to himself." A mother may have her child almost always with her and yet be "leaving him to himself." A child is "left to himself" whenever he is allowed to do as he likes, whenever his character is not watched over, and his evil inclinations checked. It is the spoilt child who brings his mother to shame. The mother is specially mentioned because she has the first and the most direct and constant influence on the child. And when children are allowed to do as they like it is usually from a weak fondness and over-indulgence on the mother's part rather than on the father's. In all reproof of the faults of children the object aimed at is not merely to guide them aright at the present time, but also to make them able to guide themselves aright when they shall have become older, correct their own faults, and restrain their own inclination to what is evil. A self-willed child "brings his mother to shame," because the remarks of her acquaintance on his character and conduct never fail to reach her ears. In nine cases out of ten, shameful conduct on the part of a man signifies shameful carelessness on the part of that man's mother when he was a child and subject to her authority and influence. The children who are sure to honour their mother when they grow up are those who in childhood were kept in their proper place, whose waywardness and inclination to what is evil were kept in check with the greatest kindness indeed, but still with the greatest firmness. Children thus trained have something to be grateful for. One cannot but believe that the grace of God often reclaims in after-years, and restores to what they should have been, many of those whose character seemed deeply injured and likely to be ruined by the mistaken treatment of a parent in childhood. But must it not sometimes be the case that the grace of God does not reclaim them? For our wills are free. It should be borne in mind that a father and a mother constantly differ much from each other in character and in their ideas of their duty towards their children, and so the one may in part correct the mischievous influence of the other. And the evil influence of home is, happily, often corrected by the beneficial influence of school discipline. (*W. H. Nauben, M.A.*) *Left to himself*:—1. Left to himself, he will not fully know right or wrong. 2. Left to himself, he will grow proud and self-confident. 3. Left to himself, he will take up with bad companions. 4. Left to himself, he will think more about his pleasures than his duties. 5. Left to himself, childish follies will develop into man's vices. (*Robert Tuck, B.A.*) *A child left to himself*:—Thelwall thought it very unfair to influence a child's mind by inculcating any opinions before it should have come to years of discretion and be able to choose for itself. I showed him my garden, and told him it was my botanical garden. "How so?" said he; "it is covered with weeds." "Oh," I replied, "that is only because it has not yet come to its age of discretion and choice. The weeds, you see, have taken the liberty to grow, and I thought it unfair in me to prejudice the soil towards roses and strawberries."

(Coleridge's Table Talk.) *Children impressed by gentle rule*:—It is a great mistake to suppose that what will make a child stare or tremble impresses more authority. The violent emphasis, the hard, stormy voice, the menacing air only weakens authority; it commands a good thing as if it were only a bad, and fit to be no way impressed, save by some stress of assumption. Let the command be always given quietly, as if it had some right in itself and could utter itself to the conscience by some emphasis of its own. Is it not well understood that a bawling and violent teamster has no real government of his team? Is it not practically seen that a skilful commander of one of those huge floating cities, moved by steam on our American waters, manages and works every motion by the waving of a hand, or by signs that pass in silence—issuing no order at all, save in the gentlest undertone of voice? So when there is, or is to be, a real order and law in the house, it will come of no hard and boisterous or fretful and termagant way of commandment. Gentleness will speak the word of firmness, and firmness will be clothed in the airs of true gentleness. (H. Bushnell.)

Ver. 18. **Where there is no vision, the people perish.**—*The improvement of the ministry of the Word*:—What makes a people very unhappy with respect to the concerns of their souls? The want of vision puts a people in very unhappy circumstances. By vision is understood prophecy. By prophecy is meant the preaching, expounding, and applying the Word of God. Doctrine: Though the want of the ministry of the Word makes a people very unhappy, yet it is not the having of it, but the right improving of it that makes them happy. I. **DEPLORABLE IS THE CASE OF THOSE WHO ARE DEPRIVED OF THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD.** What makes the case so deplorable? The original word means, the people are naked, they are left in a bare condition (Exod. xxii. 25). They are stripped of their ornaments, to their shame. They are stripped of their armour, left naked in the midst of danger. They are stripped of the means of their defence. Hence they are exposed in a special manner to the subtlety and violence of their spiritual enemies, without the ordinary means of help. Where there is no vision the people go backward. They leave their first love, their first ways in religion; they fall into a spiritual decay and apostasy. The people are drawn away: from their God and from their duty. The people are idle—they give over their work. The people perish—die for lack of instruction; are destroyed for lack of knowledge. II. **THE MERE HAVING THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO MAKE A PEOPLE HAPPY.** The people may have it, and yet get no saving benefit from it. Outward privileges make no man a happy man. The mere having the Word will aggravate the condemnation of those that have it and walk not answerably to it. III. **A RIGHT IMPROVEMENT OF THE MERCY OF THE WORD WILL MAKE A HAPPY PEOPLE.** This improvement consists in two things—1. Faith in Jesus Christ. 2. Holiness of life. This improvement will make happy souls here and hereafter. Here, in peace with God, pardon of sin, all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; and hereafter in eternal salvation. It bids fair for prosperity in earthly things. It gives happiness under the crosses and trials of this world. It puts a happiness into the relations in which we stand. Directions for improving the ministry of the Word: 1. Pray much for a real benefit from ordinances. 2. Diligently attend upon ordinances. 3. Meditate upon what you hear, and converse with one another about it. 4. Set yourselves humbly to obey the truths delivered from the Lord's Word, embracing them by faith. 5. Put your hand to the Lord's work in your several stations in your families and among those with whom you converse, to prosecute the great ends of the gospel. (T. Boston, D.D.) *The vitality of vision*:—I. **WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF THE PRESENT WORKING OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD, CHARITY AND HOPE FADE.** The progress of the age is Christ's work. Beneficial operations of all kinds are His present-day miracles. The sympathy of the age, its mission, its humanity, its sacrifice, its enthusiasm for progress, is Christ's doing. Let us see Him in the past and in the present. Then we shall have a nobler faith, a larger charity, and a radiant hopefulness. II. **WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF THE DIVINE FATHERHOOD, DEVOTION DECAYS.** Our devotional life accords with the conception of God we hold up to our attention. If we think of God as stern, arbitrary, partial, we cannot experience love, worship, trust, sacrifice. The human heart is constituted to love only the lovable; to worship only the perfect and benevolent; to trust only the just and true. III. **WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, PRACTICAL ENERGY DECLINES.** Give up the idea of a Supreme Mind caring for all, and life is not worth living. Let the

vision of the all-embracing providence of God be clear, and life will be transfigured. All Christian workers are thus sustained. Failure, loss, rejection, may be the record on the visible side; but faith sees on the unseen side an all-comprehending spiritual kingdom, and says, "All things work together for good."

IV. WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF TRUTH AND FACT, KNOWLEDGE DECAYS. As tradition and conservation prevail truth becomes a dead carcass. The hour for revival, for reform, is come, and the minds that see the truth lead the new movement. The dreams of seers renew the life of the world's thought. V. WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF THE POSSIBILITIES OF HUMAN NATURE, SYMPATHY DECAYS. Man has instinctively recognised his fellow as spiritual, as free, as immortal, as possessing unlimited capacities of progress, and as the object, consequently, of intense interest and of unlimited love. The vision of that ideal of man is the inspiration of all philanthropy. VI. WHERE THERE IS NO VISION OF DUTY, HOLINESS DECLINES. Man is the subject of relations. The highest relation he maintains is to Christ. His life-care is the duty he owes to Christ. As we have that vision before us, we shall ennoble all we do. VII. THE VISION OF HEAVEN SAVES HOPE FROM PERISHING. The inspiration of all progress is hope. The most fruitful hope we can cherish is the perfection of mankind in the celestial life in fellowship with Christ. Such a vision ennobles, sanctifies, vitalises, lights up the present with heavenly radiance, and makes death the gate of life. (*T. Matthews.*)

Divine vision essential to human salvation:—I. TRUE VISION IS A REVELATION FROM GOD. A communication not furnished by nature; not the product of human intellect, or imagination, or fancy; not the "tradition of the elders," however venerable; but a special unfolding of the Divine nature and government, adapted to the moral exigencies of the race. Such a communication is possible. Such is probable—1. From conflicting indications of the Divine character furnished by nature. 2. The universally felt moral necessities of man. Such is actually accomplished, as the whole body of Christian evidence attests. II. THERE ARE MANY PLACES WHERE, AS YET, THIS VISION IS NOT. Where it is not known. Where it is not published. Where it is not believed. III. WHERE IT IS NOT, THE PEOPLE PERISH. 1. It alone reveals a Saviour and a salvation adapted to man. 2. It alone is associated with spiritual power to deliver man from the bondage, and misery, and guilt, and doom, of sin. The vision of God is to them that possess it a most precious thing. They who possess it not ought to be the objects of the deepest compassion. They who do possess it are bound, by every consideration of gratitude and pity, to send it to those who do not. (*J. M. Jarvie.*)

Divine revelation:—The text presents two facts concerning redemptive revelation. I. ITS ABSENCE IS A GREAT CALAMITY. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." The word "perish" has been variously rendered: some read "will apostatise," others "are made naked," others "are dispersed," others "are become disorderly." All renderings agree in expressing the idea of calamity, and truly is it not a sad calamity to be deprived of the Bible? II. ITS REGULATIVE EXPERIENCE IS A GREAT BLESSING. "He that keepeth the law, happy is he." This "vision" is not an abstraction or a speculative system—it is a "law"; it comes with Divine authority; it demands obedience; it is not the mere subject for a creed, but the code for a life; its aim is to regulate all the movements of the soul. It is only those who are ruled by it who are made happy, those who have it and are not controlled by it will as assuredly perish. It is not the hearers of the law who are just before God, but the doers of the law. Who is the happy man? Not the man who has the "vision" and does not study it, nor the man who studies it and never reduces it to practice: it is the man who translates the "vision" into his life. "He that keepeth the law, happy is he." There is no heaven for man but in obedience to God. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

The soul perishing for lack of vision:—The vision here is acquaintance with God and the things of the invisible world. Vision became almost synonymous with revelation. Where there is no Bible, there can be no vision. To talk of preparing a nation for the reception of the Bible, by first of all civilising that nation is to betray ignorance of what has produced the degeneracy of humanity, and mistrust of the engine which God has placed in our hands. The civilisation must and will follow the reception of the Bible. Notice the marginal rendering, "the people is made naked." The people is stripped, the people has no clothing in which to appear before God, if you take away revelation. They may attempt a righteousness of their own, and think to cover themselves with a covering which their own hands have woven. But the text is most emphatic in denouncing such schemes and hopes. We must put on Christ, and be clothed

with His righteousness. If we would make a right and full use of the disclosures and statements of our Bible, we must, it would seem, have the things of redemption and futurity presented with the same distinctness and vividness to the internal organs, as the things of the world are to the external. This is the great triumph of spirit over matter. Speak to those whose religion is more than nominal, who do behold Christ with the eye of the soul. We account for much of that slow progress in piety, which you both observe in others and lament in yourselves, on the principle that you are but seldom occupied with contemplations of the invisible world. Let us not be wanting in diligence in using the telescope that has been entrusted to us to aid us in seeing the unseen. (*H. Melvill, B.D.*) *No vision:—*The question suggested by the text is, *Can we see? Were we made to see?* Is all else related by law of adaptation to man on this earth save God Himself who made the earth and man? It is vision that decides our scale in this world, and our honour and glory in the world to come. For ages men have believed that they were made to see and know God in His works and in His Word; that we have not only eyes, but objects; that we can hold intercourse with God—love Him, trust Him, and pray to Him. The peril of our age is no new peril. Materialism is as old as Sadducean Judaism. This is the great vital difference in men—vision. This it is that decides their principles, their ethics, their characters. **I. MATERIALISTIC IDEAS OF LIFE BLIND US TO THE TRUE VISION.** We are in a world of material things. But we, Christians, build temples to the invisible Lord. We seek and we worship a Saviour whom, not having seen, we love. We judge morality to be more than utility. We walk by faith, not by sight. There is no true vision without the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. **II. CHRIST IS THE REVEALER OF LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.** These words contain two distinct truths. Life is the spiritual view of all things. Immortality is life in Christ beyond the grave. **III. CHARACTER IS DECIDED BY OUR VISIONS OF TRUTH.** The right life comes from the right thought. If my life is to be redeemed and moulded by Divine influences, then my vision is all in all to me. **IV. PERISHING IS SEEN IN THIS PRESENT LIFE.** Men do perish! Compared with what you might be, you are now perishing. Woe to that nation that has no eye to see the face of God in Christ! (*W. M. Statham.*) *The beneficent influence of heavenly visions:—*Man has spiritual wants as well as bodily wants, and he must have spiritual things to satisfy them. Temporal and visible things meet and satisfy all the wants of the body, but the soul must receive its sustenance from the invisible and the eternal. The spiritual world is a fact to the senses of the soul as truly as the material world is a fact to the bodily senses. Visions are as necessary for the soul as food for the body, and so heavenly visions were not God's gifts to one nation and for a limited time, but are to all countries and for all times. Godly men in our days are having visions exactly in the same sense as the seers and prophets of old; the difference is in degree, not in kind. But a distinction must be made between the seer in the highest sense and seers in a general sense. God inspires and gives special visions to a chosen few in different ages and countries. Note the powers of inward vision to which we give the names of insight and intuition—insight into human character, intuition of Divine principles—clear knowledge of what man is and how God will act. The original meaning of the word "saw," is to cleave, or split; then to see into, to see through, to get down beneath the surface of things and discover their real nature. What characterises the bulk of Hebrew visions is "penetrativeness." All the seers of the world are hard workers, and are active in their visions. Sometimes the seer does valuable service to the world by rediscovering some great revealed truth which had been hidden by the accretion of ages of erroneous human ideas and creeds. Luther was such an one. And we are to thank Heaven for seers like Carlyle, Ruskin, Beecher, Browning, and Tennyson, who fearlessly cleave old customs, shams, conventionalisms, dogmas, and creeds, and proclaim to the world, like the prophets of old, eternal and unchangeable truths. Note the mighty influence of heavenly visions on the world. What would have been the moral condition of the world if God had given no visions to holy and inspired men? **I. THE RESTRAINING POWER OF VISIONS.** In the days of Samuel there was "no open vision." God mercifully raised him up, and gave him visions to enable him to check and restrain the ungodliness of his age. Our great want is more men of visions as political and social reformers and preachers. **II. THE SUSTAINING POWER OF VISIONS.** Men are sure to perish socially and spiritually if God does not mercifully grant them visions. **III. THE ENNOBLING INFLUENCE OF VISIONS UPON MEN'S CHARACTERS.** The tendency of God's visions to men is to purify their thoughts, to elevate their spirits, to

ennoble their characters. The objective in the visions gradually becomes subjective, as a part of the character. But you are not to expect these heavenly visions by sleeping and dreaming, but by holy meditation, fervent prayer, and strenuous effort to live the life of the Son of God. IV. THE BLESSEDNESS OF OBEDIENCE TO THE HEAVENLY VISIONS. If we would know the highest joy of visions, we must obey them. (*Z. Mather.*) *Ideals*:—Man talks to God; that is prayer. God talks with man; that is inspiration. According to the sensational philosophy there is no vision, there is no invisible world, or at least we cannot know it directly and immediately. This takes all the glory out of life. Take out from man the power of perceiving the invisible and the eternal, and all life loses its life. God is no longer a Divine reality. He is only an opinion. The same philosophy which robs the universe of its God robs man of his soul. This philosophy is equally fatal to morals. There are no longer any great, eternal, immutable laws. Take vision out of religion, what have you left? You had a Church of Christ, now you have a Society of Ethical Culture. I. IDEALS ARE REALITIES. What we call ideals are not conceptions we have created; they are realities we have discovered. The great laws of nature are not created by the scientists. They only formulate and express the laws of nature. The laws of harmony are eternal; and when the musician finds a new harmony, he finds what was before. In the ethical realm, the great laws of righteousness are not created; they are eternal. Moses did not make them, he only found forms in which to state them. God is not a thesis, an opinion, a theory, a supposition, created to account for phenomena; He is the great underlying reality of which all phenomena are the manifestation. II. IMAGINATION IS SEEING. Science owes its progress to this power of vision. All the greatest men of science first saw dimly and imperfectly the invisible realities, then followed, tested, and tried their visions, and proved the reality of them. The great seers and prophets of all time have not been men who have created thoughts to inspire us; they have been men with eyes that saw, and they have helped also to see. III. IDEALS BEING REALITIES, AND IMAGINATION SEEING, SCEPTICISM IS IGNORANCE. By scepticism is meant the doubt that scoffs at the invisible and eternal, not the mere questioning of a particular dogma. We are not to measure the truth by our capacity to see, but our capacity to see by the truth. The world needs nothing so much as men who will carry the spirit of vision into every phase of life. There are two classes of men in this world—drudges and dreamers. The man who works without vision, who is not lifted up by his thoughts out of mere material things, he is a drudge. (*Lyman Abbott.*)

Ver. 20. *Seest thou a man that is hasty in his words?*—*Impetuosity of temper*:—The Adige at Verona appears to be a river quite broad and deep enough for navigation, but its current is so rapid as to make it quite unserviceable. Many men are so rash and impetuous, and at the same time so suddenly angry and excited, that their otherwise most valuable abilities are rendered useless for any good purpose. (*C. H. Spurgeon.*)

Ver. 23. *A man's pride shall bring him low.*—*On pride*:—Pride, though it implies an assumption of superiority, has a manifest tendency to degradation. 1. A man's pride will bring him low because it subjects him to the imputation of folly. There is no condition of life that can warrant the indulgence of this sinful and corrupt passion. The maxims of human policy teach us that in proportion to the trust must be the responsibility. The uncertainty and imperfection of every blessing which this world affords should alone be sufficient to prevent that silly exaltation of the mind which constitutes pride. Neither abundance of riches nor superior endowments of the mind are a sufficient justification for pride. Neither the acquisition of fame, the flatteries of self-love, nor the consciousness of distinguished merit, should swell the heart with arrogance or pride. The truest characteristics of superior greatness and superior wisdom are modesty and humility; modesty freed from false shame, and humility without affectation or abasement. If these motives are insufficient to warrant the indulgence of pride, much less ought it to arise from the casual distinction of rank in the different orders of men. Pride is not confined to any particular rank or station. From whatever cause it proceeds, it always betokens weakness, folly, and corruption. 2. The various evils, and the general depravity which it produces. The text is often verified as "pride produces poverty." More persons have sunk into poverty from this cause than from any other. From indulging in a thousand idle expenses,

in order to support a kind of pompous vanity, the proud man can seldom spare a charitable mite "to give to him that needeth." Pride is also the source of continual mortification. The petty vexations of pride that are compounded with every vain, selfish, and malignant passion have no claim to our indulgence. Pride is more productive of quarrels, bitterness, and strife than anything else. This base and selfish passion always creates, and always keeps alive, a watchful and incessant jealousy of power. Hence the mildest exhortation and the most friendly remonstrance is often converted into the bitterness of accusation or the insolence of reproach. This odious vice is seen at its worst in the awful end of the suicide. The dreadful act of self-destruction is often committed in the evil moment of wounded pride or mortified ambition. The proud man sits on an imaginary eminence of his own creation, and propagates servility or wretchedness all around him. In a mind thus bewildered and deceived the first principle of improvement is wanting. He who is not conscious of any defect can have no sufficient motive for amendment. Pride never appears so sinful and offensive as when we consider man in relation to his Maker. Then we perceive it destroying the efficacy and poisoning the very source of all those virtues which he is chiefly bound to practise. The proud man is in reality always degraded in proportion as he thinks himself exalted. (*J. Hewlett, B.D.*) **Honour shall uphold the humble in spirit.—Honour** :—This word means "nobleness of mind." It is a natural instinct of human nature to be trustful, especially when a man's honour is at stake; but there has been so much deception as to make almost everybody doubt everybody else. Every representation we make should be the truth; a deception is never excusable. 1. Honour is an acquired nature. The germ of honour is born in us, but every child has to be taught by example and precept to cultivate it. We sometimes cram our children too much with catechism, and omit to cultivate their honour. There is as much religion in being honourable as in being prayerful. 2. Honour should become an essential part of our nature. It is only the ignorant and the foolish who can be tickled by a title or a name. Let us seek to have honour in our nature. Honour should grow in us and become an essential part of our nature. Uncommon honour should be the common practice of everybody. 3. Honour should be the principle of all our transactions. Whether you gain by it or not, be honourable. Let your honour be as true in the dark as in the light. 4. In honour prefer one another. Do not gibe at a friend or detract from an enemy. If you can praise one another, do so, but never throw mud at anybody. If you really know that a man or woman is doing wrong, be honourable enough to tell them so, and not so mean as to talk of it behind their backs. Be honourable in all your sayings and in all your doings, so that this world, through you, may become a more joyous dwelling-place. (*W. Birch.*)

Ver. 25. The fear of man bringeth a snare.—*The mischiefs of slavish complaisance and cowardice* :—Every passion of the soul may be of use to us, but is capable also, by being perverted, of causing much vexation and misery to ourselves and injury to our fellow-creatures. Fear, while it proceeds from right principles, and is proportioned to the weight and moment of the evils about which it is conversant, must serve the most beneficial purposes, as it warns us where our greatest danger lies, and strongly prompts us to avoid it. But the case is quite otherwise when it forms imaginary dangers and alarms with false terrors. Then our fears turn us aside from our duty, and in avoiding trifling evils we run ourselves into greater. I. **WHAT IS THE FEAR OF MAN?** A reverence of human authority and customs, and a dread of the censure and reproaches of our fellow-creatures. 1. There is a reverence due to human authority in all points that do not exceed the just bounds of it, and the paying this regard is absolutely necessary to hold the frame of civil societies together. The ends of society cannot be secured but by mutual condescension and respect, and the compliance and submission of the minor part, in things lawful. 2. A man ought to be afraid of censure and reproach being fixed upon him, and anxious to deliver and clear himself from it. Men must be of a temper quite stupid if they have no fear at all of public reproach and infamy, and must lose a very powerful restraint from mean, ungenerous, and disgraceful practices. 3. We are guilty of the utmost rashness and folly if we expose ourselves to the resentments of our fellow-men unnecessarily. And a dread of those punishments which the civil magistrate inflicts is not only lawful, but necessary. Thus far, then, the fear of man may be defended and justified. II. **IN WHAT SENSE IT BRINGETH A SNARE.** It throws temptations in men's way which are likely to prevail

so far as to destroy all improvements in true wisdom and virtue. 1. Suppose a man, under the influence of this slavish principle, engages in search after truth, what proficiency is it possible for him to make? In order to making improvements in Divine knowledge it is absolutely necessary that the mind be free, calm, and unruffled, under no restraint or terror. There must be no corrupt passion to darken the understanding, nor private interest to mislead and pervert it. 2. It is as great an absurdity to expect that one who is dispirited by worldly fears should be a confessor and martyr for true religion as that a coward should be brave and valiant. Slavish fear of man leads men even to revile and banter the truth. 3. This fear will have the same malignant influence upon our morals as upon our faith. When it rises to such a height as to overrule the dictates of natural conscience, and entirely to destroy the strength and constancy of our minds, we are an easy prey to every temptation, and lie open to the most desperate and abandoned wickedness. If it be our ultimate view to secure the countenance and favour of persons in authority and avoid their displeasure, this likewise will subject us to many snares and inconveniences. III. OFFER SOME REMEDIES AGAINST THIS FEAR OF MAN. 1. Maintain and improve in our minds a strong sense of the necessary difference between good and evil. 2. Add a becoming sense of the dignity of our nature. 3. Trust in God, as advised in the latter part of the text. 4. Cultivate a supreme reverence for God. These two—fear of man and fear of God—are absolutely inconsistent, and cannot subsist together. (*James Foster.*) *The fear of man:*—This is a deadly foe to a godly, consistent life. It stops many a one on the very threshold of the kingdom. It turns back many who seemed to run well. 1. The fear of man often leads to downright, positive sin. 2. The fear of man keeps many a lad from decision for Christ. (*G. Everard, M.A.*) *The fear of man:*—I. OUR GREAT DANGER. 1. For the fear of man is more general than we are aware of. 2. To all who yield to its influence it brings a fatal snare. II. ITS PROPER AND ONLY EFFECTUAL ANTIDOTE. Regard for God Himself. We should trust Him for support, happiness, recompense. Improvement: 1. A word of caution. 2. Of encouragement. (*S. Simeon, M.A.*) *Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.*—*How to be safe:*—I. THERE IS SAFETY NOWHERE EXCEPT IN THE CARE OF GOD, for in His hands alone are sources of safety. II. God can make safe only those who TRUST HIM FULLY. III. COMPLETE TRUST CAN EXIST ONLY BETWEEN PARTIES IN ACCORD and in the confidence of each other. IV. IN ORDER TO TRUST IN THE LORD TWO THINGS ARE ESSENTIAL. 1. We must confidently believe that God is able, willing, and ready to care for us. 2. That we are worthy of His care. V. TO BE SAFE WE MUST BE AT ONE WITH GOD. VI. OUTSIDE OF GOD'S PROTECTION ARE DANGER, DARKNESS, AND DEATH—ETERNAL. (*Homiletic Review.*)

CHAPTER XXX.

VERS. 1-9. *The words of Agur the son of Jakeh.*—*Agur the philosopher:*—Who Agur was is not known. I. A DEVOUT PHILOSOPHER. 1. He was conscious of his ignorance. The first lesson for every man who would get knowledge to learn is that he knows nothing. 2. He was conscious of universal mystery. Compare Job. vii. 9, 12. He must be God Himself who could wholly comprehend the works of God. II. AN INTELLIGENT BIBLEIST. He was more than a naturalist; he was a Bibleist. 1. He regarded the Word of God as pure. Pure in its essence and in its influence. It commends itself to universal conscience. 2. He regarded it as trustworthy. God's Word is Himself—Himself revealed; he who trusts it is in safe keeping. 3. He regarded it as sufficient. It is like a vital germ—you can neither attempt to add anything to it nor take anything from it without injuring it. III. AN ENLIGHTENED SUPPLIANT. He asks—1. Deliverance from moral evil. 2. A moderate amount of worldly goods. The man was fully alive to the power of circumstances upon character, and devoutly desired that his external circumstances should be such as to conduce to spiritual excellence. (*D. Thomas, D.D.*)

Ver. 2. *Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man.*—*A homily for humble folk:*—Agur was probably a man of years and

honour, and possibly his two young friends, Ithiel and Ucal, looked up to him more than was meet, and therefore his principal endeavour was to wean them from undue confidence in himself. He passed the gravest censure upon himself, that his hearers might not suffer their faith to stand in the wisdom of men. Did Agur really mean all he said? One mark of a man's true wisdom is his knowledge of his ignorance. The truth of our text relates to one particular line of things. This man was a naturalist. He was an instructed scientist, but he felt that he could not by searching find out God, nor fashion an idea of Him from his own thoughts. I. A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US BACK FROM FAITH IN GOD. If we have to say what Agur said, let us also trust as Agur trusted. Some say, "We cannot hope to be saved, because we cannot reach the heights of other men." They are discouraged by the piety that some believers have attained. But they see these good people at their best, and they see in them the results of their faith. Some are hindered because they cannot feel such convictions of sins, &c., as other men. But our wisdom is to leave our experience with the Lord, who will appoint us sun or shade, as best will suit our growth. Seek not to copy another man's ups or downs; but wait on God, and put thy trust in Him, even though thou shouldst seem to thyself to be more foolish than any other living man. II. A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US FROM LEARNING. If you have not the understanding of a man, there is so much more cause that you should go to school to the Holy Spirit, till the eyes of your understanding shall be enlightened, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Vital truth is simple. These things of heavenly learning are revealed to babes. The Holy Ghost is a great teacher. The sense of ignorance is a very good beginning for a learner. The doorstep of the palace of Wisdom is a humble sense of ignorance. III. A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT KEEP US BACK FROM SERVING GOD. The Lord loves to use tools that are not rusted with self-conceit. God can use inferior persons for grand purposes. He has often done so. His greatest victories were won by a hammer and a tent-pin, by an ox-goad, by the jawbone of an ass, by a sling and stone, and such like. His greatest prophets at the first tried to excuse themselves on the ground of unfitness. The Lord does not expect of you more than you can do: it is accepted if it be according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not. If you can do but little, make the best of yourself by intensity and by perseverance. Make up by spiritual force what you lack in natural ability. You that cannot do very much, take care never to lose an opportunity. IV. A SENSE OF INFERIORITY MUST NOT HINDER OUR JOY IN THE LORD. If you feel that you are more brutish than anybody else, yet believe in God up to the hilt; believe in Him, and trust Him with all your heart, and then feel all the more gratitude that He should have loved such a worthless one as you. Glorify God by your very weakness. Glory in your infirmity. (C. H. Spurgeon.)

Ver. 4. *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended?*—*God's riddle*:—This verse gives God Almighty's great conundrum spoken out of eternity into time; it is the riddle propounded by the Supreme Intelligence to the heart and reason of every man born into the world. The history of humanity is little else than one long wrestle with God's infinite conundrum. There are noble souls and able thinkers who never guess the riddle here. There are lesser minds that, light-heartedly, give the riddle up—those who call themselves agnostics. Never be a giver-up of God's riddles; work at them till you die. The position of a giver-up of God's riddle is dreary and paralysing; it cauterises imagination, which is man's creative faculty; it ignores a thousand self-evident principles; it freezes the main-springs of human activity; and it is not really humble—it implies the possession of all kinds of knowledge. It is a sweet legend of the Talmud that the indentation of the upper lip of every man born into the world is a mark of the finger of God touching the mouth at birth and saying, "Child, thou knowest, but thou shalt not be able to reveal that which thou knowest till thou hast learnt it by the things which thou shalt suffer in the infant school of human life." "What is His name?" It is a beautiful name, a name that can save the anxious heart from losing its way in the tangled speculations that pass muster for religious truth. It is a name that can irradiate with eternal hope the very darkest problems of life. It is a name that can encourage men to wait and work trustfully, patiently, hopefully. How infinitely varied are the processes by which the moral sense of man feels after and finds, and tries to give a name to the Supreme Intelligence who "holds the winds in His fists." Darwin says, "There lives and works a soul in all things; one hand

has surely worked through this universe." Schlermann, the explorer, was puzzled by some irregular holes upon the crumbling front of an ancient temple resembling the impression of nails, as if some Greek characters had once been fastened to the stone. He bethought him of tracing between the nail-marks with a piece of chalk, and behold there stood out the Greek word Θεός—God. But this name is rudimentary and inadequate. Boundless intelligence, administering boundless power, by its very awfulness and vagueness has constantly evolved in human history the grossest caricatures of the name of God. The Eternal Power has manifested His moral life, His character, His feeling toward the race, in one human form, one supernatural and Divine Man, who, as the heart of God incarnate, is "the visible moral embodiment of the all-pervading omnipotence Himself for ever invisible." The embodiment soon returned to the Father; that is, He withdrew from limitations, and returned to universal life; but He has made known God's name to the race. The Divine Man of Nazareth is the sacrament of God; He is the outward and visible sign of the heart of universal Fatherhood; and to know it, with an intense spiritual conviction that is beyond expression, is to know the answer to God's riddle about Himself. (*Canon Wilberforce.*)

Ver. 7. Two things have I required of Thee; deny me them not before I die.—*Agur's request:*—Agur seems to allude to the ancient custom of feeding slaves in great families. They had a certain measure of food daily allowed them. He may also have had in view the manner in which God fed the people of Israel in the wilderness with manna, of which they were commanded to gather daily a certain measure, but none for the morrow. That God would thus supply his wants from day to day was his modest petition. We should interpret the prayer of this wise man in a favourable and candid manner, as put up by one who was religious and humble, and disposed to submit his own will to the will of God. It is a prayer of choice, or a comparative prayer. Riches, poverty, and a competency—these are things which cannot be accurately fixed without reference to the state and condition of men. Food convenient for a man is such a competency as will maintain him in that order, degree, or calling in which God hath placed him. The moderation of Agur's prayer is highly commendable if we consider that he lived at a time when temporal blessings were more expressly promised, and spiritual blessings less clearly propounded, than under the gospel. A competency, or a middle state between want and superfluity, deserves to be preferred as the best and happiest condition. The wiser Gentiles were of this opinion, but their reasons are reasons of convenience; but Agur gives for his choice a religious and pious reason. If we carefully examine the political laws of Moses, we shall find that the Divine providence intended the Jewish people for that very situation between poverty and riches which was the object of Agur's wish. The means of accumulating great wealth by an extensive commerce, by circulating large sums of money upon large interests, by extending their dominions, and by planting colonies abroad, were withholden from them; and their lands, industriously cultivated, would, by the blessing of God, furnish them with the necessaries, though not the superfluities, of life. Vows of poverty are made on the basis of our Lord's counsel to the young ruler. But that was, clearly, an extraordinary case. The practice of the first Christians, who sold their lands and possessions, is alleged in favour of voluntary poverty. But there is nothing commendable in superstitious and affected poverty. Agur represents poverty as a state which exposes to the temptations of dishonesty and perjury, and prays that he may not be exposed to it, and to the temptations which accompany it. No doubt he added endeavours to his petitions. It is not unlawful to possess riches. They are of their own nature indifferent. Many good men mentioned in sacred history were rich; but none of them are said to have been desirous of riches. Agur was apprehensive lest wealth should make him irreligious. Great wealth and power and honours bring with them a variety of business, draw after them a multitude of flatterers, nourish pride and conceit, and afford continual means and opportunities of pursuing all sorts of pleasures; so that what with the cares, and what with the diversions of life, no time is left for God and religion. There is, then, a plain and good reason why God for the most part withhold a great abundance of outward things from those whom He most loves, namely, lest by enriching the man He should lose the servant. It is very imprudent, therefore, in men earnestly to pursue that which so much endangers their welfare. They to whom wealth hath presented itself, either unsought, or honestly obtained, ought to be very cautious and considerate. Their state is

exposed to danger, and yet it is possible to be wise and happy and safe in it, if proper means be used. (*John Jortin, D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Remove far from me vanity and lies.—*On the purity of the heart*:—The first request is, “Remove far from me vanity and lies.” “Vanity” signifies lightness, or emptiness. “Lies” signify falsehood. Sometimes the word vanity is used of idolatrous worship; sometimes to denote the folly and unprofitableness of any vice. 1. The prayer implies a desire that we may be preserved from setting our affections on such objects as are but vain and unsatisfying, and will, in the end, disappoint our expectation. When we place our supreme happiness upon the world, instead of making it a means of leading us to God, then its inherent vanity appears. There is something more in this request than being preserved from practices directly vicious. 2. The prayer implies that God would graciously preserve us from deceiving ourselves, and thinking our character better and our state safer than it really is. We ought to pray for preservation from self-deceit, as to particular branches of our character and conduct, as well as our general state. 3. The request implies a desire to be preserved from pride and self-conceit upon any subject. Everything may be the fuel of pride—our persons, our performances, our relations, our possessions. 4. This request implies a desire to be delivered from fraud and dissimulation of every kind. There is no end which a good man ought to aim at which may not be more certainly, safely, and speedily obtained by the strictest and most inviolable sincerity than by any acts of dissimulation whatever. (1) Learn the duty of prayer. (2) Learn the importance of habitual watchfulness. (3) Learn the importance of strict adherence to truth. (*J. Witherspoon, D.D.*)

On the happiness of a mind open to the impression of truth and attached to duty:—In this comprehensive prayer everything conducive to the perfection of the soul, to the support of the body, to our comfortable subsistence in this world, and to our preparation for a state of eternal felicity; everything that should excite the desires, and employ the activity of a wise and good man, is contained. Take the sentence, “Remove far from me vanity and lies.” 1. Vanity is that passion which is founded on an exorbitant opinion of one’s own situation and accomplishments, and is constantly engaged in the pursuit of admiration and applause. This passion is accompanied by great delusion with respect to ourselves, to others, and to human nature in general. The term may, however, include whatever obscures the understanding with prejudice, whatever dazzles the fancy with delusive appearances of pleasure, whatever captivates the heart with the representation of fictitious or exaggerated delight; whatever misleads the judgment or misplaces the affections. 2. Under the term “lies” is comprehended that corruption of heart which is the cause of wilful and fraudulent deception. The power of self-deception is astonishing. That the greatest evils to which we are at present exposed proceed from the folly and corruption of mankind will be acknowledged by every person of discernment. Two grand objects occupy the attention and activity of all mankind—the acquirement of good and the removal of evil. (*W. L. Brown, D.D.*)

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me.—*Seeking a competency in the wisdom of Providence*:—Few things are of more moment than to have our desires of temporal blessings limited and directed in a proper manner.

I. WHAT WE MAY LEARN IN GENERAL FROM THIS PRAYER. 1. That it is lawful to pray for temporal blessings. 2. That God is the real and proper giver of every temporal, as well as of every spiritual, blessing. **II. THE PARTICULAR OBJECT OF THE PROPHET’S DESIRE.** He does not refuse submission to the will of God by thus making choice of a particular state of life. Poverty and riches are mentioned as the two extremes. Where is the middle between the two? 1. God is the best judge of what is most fit and convenient for us. 2. Resignation to God is a most acceptable expression, both of our worship and obedience. Resignation is the very habit of obedience. 3. Such a temper of mind will greatly contribute to our own inward peace. It will preserve us from perplexing anxiety and many uneasy fears for futurity. (*John Witherspoon, D.D.*)

The danger of prosperity:—1. An easy and affluent fortune affords the means not only of pampering our bodies, but of gratifying all our lusts and appetites. 2. Indulgence leads men to place their happiness in such enjoyments. 3. When the better part is neglected, every vice will spring up in the soul. See the great malignity and deceitfulness of sin. Make a wise improvement of the advantages you enjoy over one another. Let all persons in health, quiet and peaceful circumstances, learn what it is they ought to guard against—pride, security, forgetfulness of God, &c. (*Ibid.*) *The danger of adversity*:—It is a matter of

experience that great poverty makes many take unjust and unwarrantable methods of procuring relief. 1. Ignorance is one reason why poverty becomes a temptation to fraud. 2. To this fraud the poor are introduced insensibly, and led on by degrees. 3. In time it destroys the sense of shame. Let me put you in mind—(1) What reason many have to be thankful to the God of life, who has given them their daily provision, in fulness and sufficiency. A humble, thankful disposition is their duty. (2) If poverty is a temptation, it ought to be an argument to all to avoid it, or seek deliverance from it by lawful means. (3) If you are poor, pray God to preserve you from fraud and disingenuity of every kind. You should not only study to preserve yourselves from sin, but from all such circumstances of temptation as are dangerous to human constancy. How necessary it is that you should look for the Divine assistance and direction, to avoid the temptations of every state of life. What an inseparable connection there is between true religion and your employments and state in this present world. Whether you be rich or poor, remember an approaching eternity. (*Ibid.*)

On the temptations and dangers of opulence and exalted station:—That virtue and happiness are generally found between opposite extremes will be universally acknowledged. If we review the economy and course of nature we shall find that extremes are unknown in its constitution, and that every temporary excess is counterpoised by another till the proper balance be restored. Extremes are the result solely of human folly and corruption. The golden rule of mediocrity is peculiarly applicable in estimating the different conditions of human life.

I. THE DANGERS, TEMPTATIONS, AND GENERAL INCONVENIENCES OF A WEALTHY AND EXALTED STATION. Many shapes of vice and misery stand behind the blaze of opulence.

1. Pride. Which deprives men of all true knowledge of themselves, and exposes them to the ill-will and enmity of others. Opulence and splendour tend to enfeeble, if not to eradicate a just notion of mutual dependence and obligation, and to introduce in its stead the absurd opinion of inherent and immutable independence and superiority.
2. Want of feeling for distress. Riches tend to shut the breast against emotions of compassion.
3. Effeminacy, indolence, and incapacity of exertion are natural attendants on riches and splendid station. But no real enjoyment can be obtained by man without some exertion. Exertion sweetens the enjoyment itself, and qualifies for increasing and multiplying it. The eye dazzled with the lustre of riches loses its aptitude for the research of truth. The rich are not often the learned.
4. Ambition. This passion agitates and engrosses the mind more than any other, to the dominion of which man is subject. Prosperous and exalted circumstances have a powerful tendency to excite and foster this outrageous passion.
5. Irreligion and profaneness. The most powerful incitements to religious affections are often perverted into causes of impiety.

II. THE TEMPTATIONS AND DANGERS OF POVERTY. Evil.

1. Either an entire want of the necessaries of life, or the purchase of them by unremitting toil and fatigue.
2. The want of a proper education.
3. Contempt. The poor are sometimes regarded as beings of another species—as beasts of burden to those who are more favoured by fortune. Consequently the indigent are frequently tempted to repine and murmur at the dispensations of Providence.
4. Temptations to dishonesty, fraud, and theft.

III. THE ADVANTAGES OF A MIDDLE STATION IN LIFE. This is the soil best adapted to the culture and perfection of every quality, intellectual or moral. The natural affections are not suppressed in the middle sphere, or diverted from their proper course, and operate their salutary effects on domestic and more general intercourse. Accordingly, the greatest portion of the knowledge, ability, and virtue which exist in the world will be found in this station of life. Everything said above strongly inculcates contentment and gratitude if it has pleased God to bestow on us that worldly portion which is most subservient to our happiness. Take care to judge, with candour and gentleness, of the conduct of persons placed in the higher stations of society. Take care to show great indulgence and compassion towards the poor. (*W. L. Brown, D.D.*)

The prayer of Agur:—

I. THE MEANING AND IMPORT OF THIS PETITION. A middle state of life cannot be a proper subject for all men's petitions to heaven, for human life requires a distinction of station. In society there must be subordination. This petition cannot propose one fixed standard or measure of fortune as the proper object of every man's desires. It means a competency suited to our respective stations. Riches, poverty, or competence are relative terms, and cannot be accurately fixed, without reference to our condition or situation in the world.

II. THE MORAL DISADVANTAGES WHICH ATTEND THE TWO EXTREMES OF AFFLUENCE AND INDIGENCE.

1. Such as

attend affluence. Various vices flourish. Many lose their integrity. Many abandon themselves to the indulgence of irregular passions, merely because they had the means of indulgence in their power. Riches specially tempts to forgetfulness of our Maker. A sense and feeling of want is a constant monitor, ever reminding us of our dependence. This dependence creates in us an unwillingness to offend, and an inclination to serve and please God. Opulence tempts us to be as forgetful of our neighbour as of our God. Of course all do not yield to the temptations of riches. There are many exceptions. 2. Poverty has many disadvantages and dangers. The temptations in a state of indigence are urgent, and too often prevail. It requires a peculiarly right frame and happy disposition of mind to submit with patient fortitude to humiliation, and to reject every gainful temptation that offers to corrupt. If any convenient though fraudulent expedient should offer to relieve his necessities, human weakness will be strongly urged to provide a dishonest subsistence at the expense of his integrity. The text reminds us that as we are the creatures of God, we are the dependents also on His providence. He is never inattentive to the wants of His faithful servants. These sentiments will lead us to an uncomplaining submission to His appointments, and an equal resignation in all conditions. Whatever may be our allotment in the world, let us be piously grateful to Heaven for the blessings we enjoy; let us endeavour to deserve those we want; and let it be the chief object of our attention by a wise and virtuous use of the temporary treasures or possessions entrusted to us in this life to secure the eternal possessions of the next. (*G. Carr, B.A.*) *A definition of money:—*Money is the god of the material world, and there its power stops. A London newspaper offered a prize for the best definition of money, and it was awarded to a young man whose definition was: "An article which may be used as a universal passport to everywhere except heaven, and as a universal provider of everything except happiness." *The purgatory of possessing much wealth:—*John Hopkins, the founder of the university in Baltimore bearing his name, accumulated nine millions of dollars. One day he said to his gardener: "Next to the hell of being utterly bereft of money is the purgatory of possessing a vast amount of it. I have a mission, and under its shadow I have accumulated wealth, but not happiness." (*Christian Age.*) *Little better than much:—*"Better a little fire that warms than mickle that burns." "One may be very uneasy with a plentiful fortune, and as happy in an humble condition, for it is the mind that makes us either the one or the other." "Far from Jupiter, far from the thunder." Agur's prayer is a continual lecture to him that covets more than enough. Socrates, passing through the markets, cried, "How much is here I do not want!" "That suit is best that fits me best," says an English adage. (*Saturday Magazine.*) *Easy circumstances:—*1. This prayer is deservedly admired on account of the motive by which it was dictated, viz., a concern for his own virtue on the part of him who composed it. Agur's wish for the middle state grew out of a persuasion that it was the most favourable to virtue. This is a prayer not to be led into temptation. 2. It is marked by humility and self-knowledge. 3. Notice the attainableness of the thing prayed for. Much can be done by the co-operation of man's will with the operation of God's providence and Holy Spirit. What is true of our bodily health and spiritual state is true of our worldly circumstances. These also depend very much upon ourselves. "What shall I do to be happy in this world?" This is a question of importance in itself, even if it must be regarded as a minor question. The Scriptures abound with instruction respecting it. The Church puts up many prayers for blessings merely temporal, and for deliverance from evils that can only affect us here. If any say, "This middle state, presented as so desirable, what state is it? what amount of income goes to constitute it?" I answer that it is not the same to all. What is wealth to one man would be poverty to another; what is a middle state for one would be a low state for another, and a high one for a third. He is poor whose expenses are greater than his means; and he is not so who lives within his means, and spends less than he earns or owns. By "poor" we too often designate all who live by labour, but this is a loose and improper way of speaking. He only is poor who cannot maintain the scale of living and the kind of appearance he has assumed. The way to the true happy mean between riches and poverty is the old-fashioned way of industry and frugality. Of industry the effects are better understood than those of saving. The objects and occasions that make it a duty to save are some of them distant ones, and others are not sure to arise. And the sums we can spare from our immediate wants are so small that they seem scarcely worth laying by. But the result of small savings is considerable

at last. (*A. Gibson, M.A.*) *Agur's prayer*:—I. THE PERSON HERE SPEAKING WAS A PERSON OF TRUE PIETY. This person was truly a good man, for he was humble (vers. 2, 3). He had sublime views of God (ver. 4). In his character we perceive a deep reverence for the Word of God, and great delight in its purity (ver. 5). In this character we contemplate, in relation to prayer, earnestness and judiciousness (vers. 7, 8). From God he expected all his mercies, whether spiritual or temporal, and he expected them as an undeserved favour. He did not prescribe to God, but by His Spirit he was taught to pray as in the words before us.

II. AGUR WAS A PERSON WHOSE WILL WAS ABSORBED OR LOST IN THE DIVINE WILL. This was an evidence of his piety. To submit to the will of God is His command, and is the bounden duty of all creatures. By nature the will is rebellious; it is as an iron sinew, and as a brow of brass. The first effect of the grace of God is to reconcile the mind to the plan of salvation by Jesus Christ. They wish no alteration in the doctrines of the Cross on their account; of the whole covenant, in its conditions and its Head, its promises and discipline, they say, "It is all my salvation and all my desire." They delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man, and they allow God the entire management of their providential lot. They know that the disposing of their lot is from the Lord; whether they are rich or poor, their wishes are not the rule, but the appointment of God.

III. AGUR'S DESIRE AFTER EARTHLY THINGS WERE VERY MODERATE. "Give me neither poverty, nor riches, but feed me," &c. The heart of man since the Fall, having lost God as a portion, and its interest in spiritual things, has become ravenous in its desires after the things of sense and of time. It seeks pleasure after pleasure, honour after honour, riches after riches, field after field; and yet, like the ocean, though all the rivers run into it, the heart of man is never satisfied. But the saints having returned to God in Christ, as the rest and portion of their souls, and finding themselves happy in God, are very moderate in their desires after earthly things. They desire nothing of God as to the present life which He is not willing to give, and which does not contribute to their advantage. They do not wish more than they really want, and they would not lay up treasures on earth.

IV. AGUR WAS A WISE MAN, WHO CONSIDERED THE TEMPTATIONS INCIDENT TO THE LOT OF OTHER MEN. "Lest I be full, and deny Thee." To be full is to be very rich, to fare, like the rich man in the Gospel, sumptuously every day, to have more than their hearts can wish. "Lest I be full, and deny Thee to be the Author of my mercies—deny my dependence on Thee for Thy blessing which maketh rich—deny Thee the glory due to Thy name, and take it to myself or ascribe it to others—deny Thee before men, by being ashamed of mingling with Thy poor people in Thy worship. Lest my forgetfulness of God strengthen into aversion, and my aversion become atheism, and I say, Who is the Lord?" When every gale blows perfume, and every post brings joyful intelligence, it is not possible for the spirit of a wicked man to avoid the swellings of pride, and the elevation of self-confidence. The other temptation which this good man wished to avoid, by the grace of God, was poverty: "Lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain." He doth not say, "Lest I steal and be condemned by men for it, be imprisoned for it," but "Lest I steal, and take the name of my God in vain"; that is, "Lest I dishonour God by breaking the eighth precept of His law, lest by so doing I dishonour my profession as a holy man, or lest, if charged with the crime, I should deny or conceal it, and so, by endeavouring to hide one sin, should commit another—by denying the sin of theft, commit the sin of lying." The motives against sin which animated Agur were noble motives, and such as they were should animate us. His religion was all of a piece, his prayers were the fruit of his piety, and his life corresponded to his prayers. (*Christian Recorder.*)

Agur's prayer:—This prayer may justly be considered as ejaculatory. It consists of two petitions, the one relating to spiritual blessings, the other to temporal blessings. I. "REMOVE FROM ME VANITY AND LIES." The words show Agur's concern to be delivered from everything like ostentation or self-confidence, and from the desire to utter as true things which he might not fully comprehend, with the view of being admired and applauded for his wisdom and penetration. The prayer reaches to the removal of the natural atheism and impiety of the human heart of every false notion of God, and of every imaginary ground of hope on which the unrenewed mind is apt to depend. II. "GIVE ME NEITHER POVERTY NOR RICHES." There is not a wise man acquainted with the frailties of human nature, or with the temptations incident to a condition either of peculiar difficulty or prosperity, who, if he were to express any wish concerning it at all, would not cordially join with Agur. To perceive this to be the case, consider—1. The evils incident to a state of

poverty. The incapacity of discharging necessary obligations is almost enough to mar the flight of the boldest faith, and deaden the efforts of the strongest devotion. And how often do the devices of injustice start up in the minds of the poor! In all their transactions they are ever in hazard of grasping at what is not their own, of practising falsehood, dissimulation, and even perjury. 2. The evils incident to a state of affluence. By riches we understand that surplus of wealth or property which any one enjoys above what is absolutely necessary to procure those conveniences and comforts which are suited to the condition wherein he is placed. Such riches may be a blessing, and give power to do good; but alas! they almost uniformly tend to corrupt the heart, to undermine those sentiments of dependence on God which are so becoming to the character of man, and to foment a spirit of rebellion against the Divine authority. They engender selfishness, pride, arrogance, and unbearable insolence towards others. III. BY MEANS OF A MIDDLE STATE WE ARE IN GREAT MEASURE EXEMPTED FROM THE EVILS OF BOTH THESE STATES. Such a man has sufficient to feed, and nourish, and clothe himself and those who are dependent on him. His dependence on God is neither weakened by his having too much of the world, nor his affection withdrawn from Him by having too little. Such a man is peculiarly favourable to the dispositions he should feel, and the duties he should perform towards those that are around him. Remember that God alone has the disposal of your lot. Of this you may be assured, it is the one which He knows to be best fitted for you. (*Jas. Somerville, D.D.*) *Wealth presents a broader mark for misfortune*:—Have you not seen that the flourishing tree, when adorned with luxuriant foliage, or loaded with fruit, is most easily broken by the fury of the tempest? Have you not heard that the summit of the loftiest mountain meets first the lightning of heaven? In like manner, when you multiply flocks and herds, you not only increase your cares, but present a broader mark to the shafts of misfortune. When “fed with food convenient for you,” pay a becoming attention, on the one hand, to frugality, without which none can be long independent, and with which few would be pure. Beware, on the other, of spending your life in anxiety or meanness, in order to increase your worldly store. Surely the wealth of this world is not the best blessing which your heavenly Father has to bestow. In a thousand ways which you do not foresee He can promote the happiness of those who fear Him. (*Dr. Laurie.*) *Moderate desires*:—As there is a misery in want, so there is a danger in excess. I would therefore desire neither more nor less than enough. I may as well die of a surfeit as of hunger. (*J. Warwick.*) *Neither poverty nor riches*:—I. GENERAL REMARKS ON AGUR'S PRAYER. 1. It is short, concise, but full and comprehensive. 2. It is singular with respect to its matter, as well as the manner in which it is expressed. How few of us have ever offered up such a petition! Moderation in our desires and pursuits after worldly good is an eminent attainment, but how little of it do we possess ourselves, or observe in others! 3. It discovers much heavenly-mindedness and self-denial. A man's own heart would not suggest it to him; it is a dictate of the Spirit of God. II. CONSIDER ITS IMPORT OR THE PARTICULARS INCLUDED IN THE PRAYER ITSELF. 1. It implies that both riches and poverty come from God, and are not merely the result of second causes. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord.” 2. It supposes that there is a medium between poverty and riches which is most desirable and ought to be the object of every one's request. The idea of a competency must be regulated by the extent of our actual necessities, both personal and relative. Competency must also be determined by our station and condition in life. That which is sufficient, and more than sufficient, for one, is not in all respects sufficient for another. The more we possess, the greater will be our responsibility, and the greater our danger. Learn to judge of a competency not by the sentiments of mankind, but by reason and the Word of God. If Providence has placed us in the middle state between indigence and affluence, let us learn to esteem it as the most desirable. (*B. Beddome, M.A.*) *A sufficiency adjusted and recommended*:—The wisdom and goodness of God have so ordered it that those proportions of the good things of this life which are most consistent with the interests of the soul are also most conducive to our present felicity. I. THE IMPORT OR AGUR'S WISH. 1. Poverty and riches are relative terms; the idea of them varies as they are applied to persons of different condition, education, birth, or figure of life. This wish cannot be understood to propose one certain size and measure of fortune as the proper standard of all men's desires, but in a sense accommodated to the various ranks, conditions, and characters of men. Unless we exclude temporal blessings from being the subject of human petitions, thus much we may

reasonably and lawfully ask of God. This petition is sometimes explained as requesting a middle station in life, within reach of those conveniences which the lower orders of mankind must necessarily want, and yet without embarrassment of greatness. This limitation cannot, however, be allowed, seeing that society cannot subsist without a diversity of stations and offices. Both extremes above and below the proportion of our character are equally dangerous to our virtue and happiness, and it is hard to determine which is most ineligible. II. THE FORCE OF THOSE REASONS HERE SUGGESTED FOR THIS WISH. The danger apprehended from poverty is the temptation to supply wants by fraud and violence, theft or robbery, lying or perjury. The temptation to these crimes is very strong in a state of distress. A crowd of unfortunate passions surround the man, and will not suffer him to attend to the remonstrances of justice or the precepts of religion. On the other hand, riches multiplied beyond the proportion of our character, and the wants appendant to it, naturally dispose men to forget God. They are apt in such circumstances to think themselves secure and independent, out of the reach of Providence, and no longer concerned to solicit His favour. A superfluous abundance tempts us to forget God. If, then, both poverty and riches are thus dangerous to our virtue and religion, the proper subject of our petitions to God, with regard to temporals, must be a state between these, that medium of convenience proportioned to the several conditions of life which the example in the text recommends to our choice and prayers. This wise supplicant was contented with his present situation, and though he prayed for the condition he thought most desirable, yet left the event to God, and was prepared to submit to His will, though either of the extremes should be his portion. 1. If we would avoid the dangers and temptations of poverty, it concerns us not to overrate the conveniences of our station, and to fix the proportion fit for us rather too low than too high. 2. It is a great security to use ourselves to live within the restraints of a lower condition than that we are placed in. 3. To guard against temptations from the other extreme, remember the advice of the psalmist, "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them." No condition of life is necessarily sinful or necessarily virtuous. We may pass with innocence through want and through abundance. Christian prudence will advise us to request a situation least exposed, the safe portion of a moderate adjusted convenience. (*J. Rogers.*) *Wherein is a worldly condition most eligible?*—I. THE REQUESTS—THE THINGS PLEADED FOR AT THE HANDS OF GOD. 1. "Remove far from me vanity and lies." This respects his inward man, the concerns of his soul. 2. The second request concerns his outward man, and the temporal enjoyments of this transitory life. These are also the gifts of God. Notice somewhat that he deprecates and declines, viz., poverty and riches. Something for which he supplicates, viz., food convenient for him. II. THE ARGUMENTS UPON WHICH HE GROUNDS THIS CHOICE. An argument drawn from the perils of riches and the temptations of poverty. He argues that a middle estate or condition in the world, upon rational and religious grounds, is most eligible for a man, as such, with respect to this life; or for a Christian, as such, designing the happiness of another life. Proposition—I. God hath the absolute disposal of all men as to their estates and conditions in the world. 2. God, in His various dispensations of the good and evil things of this world, acts not only as an absolute Sovereign, but according to the rules of His own most infinite wisdom, as may most conduce to His own glory and the good and weal of His own people. 3. No outward condition in the world that men can be brought into hath any influence upon God, so as to render us more or less acceptable to Him. 4. One and the same condition in the world is not alike desirable or eligible to all men under all circumstances, nor to the same men at several times, or as placed by God in several stations. III. WHAT IS THIS MIDDLE WORLDLY CONDITION? Consider it with a threefold respect. 1. With respect to a man's personal and private capacity as—a single person. 2. With respect unto a man's relative capacity—as he may be concerned to take care of others, as well as make provision for himself. 3. With respect unto a man's being placed in a higher or more public station—as magistracy or ministry. IV. UPON WHAT GROUND MAY THIS MIDDLE ESTATE BE ADJUDGED THE MOST ELIGIBLE AND DESIRABLE. It is with respect to man's short passage through this world, for his mind and for his body. It is in relation to another world. Three things are prerequisites in order to our future happiness. 1. A right and orderly entering into the way of salvation by the door of sound regeneration and conversion. 2. A progress in that way by a holy and heavenly conversation. 3. A perseverance in that way of faith and holiness to the end against all internal or external opposition. Caution to the poor. Remember that

your condition lays you open to many strong temptations to dishonour and neglect God and Christ, and your souls, and so makes way for your being miserable in both worlds. Two cautions to the rich: "Be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches." "Honour the Lord with your substance." Three cautions to those in middle state of life: See what interpretation you are to make of those providences that have put a check to your endeavours and graspings at great things in the world. Moderate your affections to the things of this world. Seeing Providence has placed you in the most eligible condition, labour to answer it, and evidence it to be so by your proficiency and progress in holiness and godliness. (*John Oakes.*)

The middle condition of life:—This is, generally at least, more safe and eligible than either want or superfluity. I. EXPLAIN THE TWOFOLD DANGER INTIMATED.

1. To deny sometimes signifies to act as if there was no righteous Governor and Judge of mankind. In the height of prosperity men are apt to be careless and inconsiderate. The vices implied are pride, presumption, arrogance, luxury, and immoderate pursuits of pleasure. Plenty too naturally begets excess. It heightens and inflames sensual passions; and inclines a man towards atheism. Riches minister to ambition, and rich men readily become imperious and tyrannical.

2. The vices to which strait and penurious circumstances expose men are theft and perjury. The causes why the poor so easily give way to temptations of this kind are the want of a good education, lack of training for specific employments. Such persons are often destitute of due regard to their reputations, and so lose one of the surest guards of virtue and integrity. Often the poor are badly influenced by their associates.

II. SUGGEST REFLECTIONS TO PREVENT MISTAKES. 1. Both riches and poverty are capable of being improved to the most useful purposes. 2. As poverty has such disadvantages, we may well commiserate the case of the poor. 3. Take care to moderate the passion for riches and greatness. (*James Foster.*)

The dangers of riches and poverty:—Agur builds his prayer for mediocrity on the opposite dangers to which riches and poverty are exposed. 1. It is inferred that riches beget self-sufficiency, a fancied independency and a denial or forgetfulness of God. The inference receives but too much confirmation from experience. Riches are not less prejudicial to happiness than they are to virtue. What are the chief preservatives against the dangers of riches? Let the rich man remember that all which he possesses was given to him, or more precisely, has been lent to him; that he has as much need of the assistance of the poor man as the poor man has of his; that rich and poor have the same natures, the same weaknesses and infirmities; and that the hand that gave the riches may withdraw them at any time. 2. It is shown that the peculiar and characteristic vices of poverty and want are dishonesty and discontent. The life of those in the lower ranks is subject to many hardships and miseries; and these present temptations to discontent and dishonesty. But let the poor remember that neither of these is likely to be of any service to them. Discontent always augments the evil with which we are oppressed. It adds to it its own bitterness. Dishonesty can at the utmost bring temporary relief. What is gained by fraud is usually wasted in extravagance. And who was ever known to rest with the commission of one crime? The bounds of integrity once broken through, it is rarely within our will or our power to retreat. In comparing their happiness with that of the rich, the poor are often deceived. (*Geo. Haggitt, M.A.*)

A moderate condition the happiest and safest:—I. A PETITION. Expressed in two ways—negatively, declaring what he would not have; positively, containing what he would have. Though expressed in two ways, this is one single request. 1. If we ought to pray against riches, we should never covet or seek after abundance and excess of worldly treasures. 2. If we ought to pray against poverty, then a superstitious affectation of wilful poverty,

such as we see in Romish monks, is neither a state of Christian perfection nor a part of religion acceptable to God. II. THE REASON OF THIS PETITION. He fears that too much affluence would lead him into impiety and irreligion. He fears that excessive poverty might incline him to rob his neighbour of his right, and back his injustice with lies and perjury. Learn—1. That the rule and measure of our endeavours and desires in the gaining and enjoying these outward conveniences ought to be their subserviency to our spiritual advantages, and the forwarding us in our duty to God and to our neighbour. 2. To assure an unblemished innocence, we ought not only to avoid gross transgressions, but even every occasion which may expose us to them. (*N. Brady.*)

Agur's request but one, and that comparative:—He that hath neither too little nor too much must needs have a competency, or food convenient for him. It is not

a prayer absolutely against riches, or absolutely against poverty. It is a prayer of choice, or a comparative prayer; as if he had said, "Rather than either riches or poverty, give me the mean between both." I. THE THING PRAYED FOR. Begin with the affirmative. If we know the mean which Agur chooseth, we shall soon guess what he understands by riches and poverty, the extremes which he refuseth. Competent food is a competent maintenance. Competency is the mean between want and superfluity. It is the same as the prayer Christ taught us to pray, "Give us our daily bread." A competency is twofold, either in regard of nature or of a man's condition. That may not be sufficient for one man's condition which is sufficient for another's. It is not unlawful to have and enjoy riches in abundance, but it is unlawful to covet and seek after them. Desire no more of such things than thou canst lawfully ask God in prayer. A competency, or middle estate between want and superfluity, is in choice to be preferred as the best and happiest condition. Agur's choice was a wise man's choice. II. THE REASON OF THE REQUEST. The rule of our desires and endeavours in the getting and enjoying of these outward things ought to be our spiritual welfare, and the bettering of us to Godward. Men who abound in wealth and superfluity are much subject to the malady of impiety and irreligion. Consider the wickedness of men's nature, which abuseth the abundance of God's blessings to dishonour Him that gave them. Consider also the unreasonable folly of men so greedily to long for and pursue after that which so much endangereth their welfare and happiness. A lesson of caution to those who are rich, to keep a continual watch over themselves, that they forget not God in their abundance. Poverty and want of things needful hath her dangers and evils, as well as riches and abundance. Stealing, not merely by force and violence, but also by fraud, cozenage, or detention of another's due. Perjury, or false swearing readily follows on fraud. The one is likely to bring on the other. We must take care to avoid the occasion of such sin, as well as the sin itself. (*Joseph Mede, B.D.*)

Poverty and riches:—1. Both poverty and riches are the gift of God; otherwise the wise man needed not to have prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," if it had been in his own power to make the choice. 2. Neither poverty nor riches are such gifts for which a wise man would pray, because each of these conditions have their dangers and inconveniences annexed to them. 3. The way to remove these inconveniences is to remove far from us vanity and lies, and then we may so moderate ourselves in each of these estates as to be humble before God in the midst of our abundance, and thankful to Him in our distress. 4. Notwithstanding this, yet the safest, and consequently the most desirable, course of life, is a middle state between poverty and riches; and it is for the interest, as well as for the ease of man, that God would let us neither want nor abound, but only "feed us with food convenient for us." (*C. Hickman, D.D.*)

The eligibility of a moderate fortune:—1. It is to a special and overruling providence of God we are to ascribe both poverty and riches. 2. A middle state of life is, to some persons, and on some accounts, more eligible than either poverty or riches. 3. Some arguments which may teach us an entire submission to the will of God, whichever of these three states He may think fit to appoint us. There will be the greatest difficulty in persuading people to this duty who labour under very hard or mean circumstances. Poverty is very apt to sink their spirits, and render them unfit for the nobler luxuries of piety and devotion. Contentment is a virtue by no means always found among rich men. A moderate fortune, if it do not afford the greatest opportunities of doing good, yet is a happy and desirable state, and perhaps, in general, the most safe and innocent. The fact that God appoints men the three different states of life is proper to teach us all, indifferently, the true art of contentment. For as the knowledge of God perfectly comprehends whatever may be good or convenient for us, so His power can effect, and His goodness will incline Him to effect it. (*R. Fiddes, D.D.*)

The danger of extremes:—I. A GOOD MAN REALISING THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF OUTWARD CIRCUMSTANCES. We say it matters not what circumstances are, we all can be good. But it is manifestly easier for some to be than others. It becomes a religious duty to make our outward circumstances helpful as far as possible, relieving us from undue care, and helping us to keep a quiet spirit. II. A GOOD MAN DISCERNING THE DANGER OF EXTREMES IN CIRCUMSTANCES. Under them men ever lose their power of self-restraint. III. A GOOD MAN PRAYING TO REACH AND REST IN THE HAPPY MEDIUM. Is such contentment with our circumstances compatible with right ambition, and striving to be faithful in all things? (*R. Tuck, B.D.*)

The proper measure of temporal wealth:—The lawfully expanded meaning of these words is, "Apportion

my possessions to my needs, my means to the ends of my being." And thus we are presented with this truth—a person has the proper measure of temporal wealth when he has sufficient to enable him to do the proper work of life. Thus the question as to what is riches and what poverty is not a question to be decided by either feeling or opinion. That we think we have too little and want more is aside of the point at issue. It is the proportion of means to ends that is the question. Our possessions are not simply sources of enjoyment; they are instruments for service. Our business in this world is to do the will of God, and not to please ourselves. Our kind of service, of course, varies—varies almost as widely as do our characters. And as our duty varies, it follows that our necessary means will also vary. Your station in life may be a prominent one; you may have more numerous and wider interests to attend to than another, and in consequence you require a proportionately larger measure of property. Or your lot may be a lowly one, little associated with the common affairs of men, and in order to a faithful service you will require much less. But the question is whether you have enough to enable you to rightly occupy your station as it is, and to do your duty well. If you have, then you have just the right amount of temporal wealth. And, mark you, this applies only to the duty of one's providential station. Let no man create all sorts of artificial obligations and unnecessary work, and then protest that his means are unequal to his needs. Let no one thrust himself into a station of life for which he was never intended, and then say he must live up to his position in society. Let him not create all sorts of lofty tastes and extravagant modes of living, and then think himself too poor because his possessions are not equal to these new inflated notions. Our means should be adjusted to our providential lot, not to our factitious circumstances. Life's obligation and life's glory lie in filling the space appointed by God, in doing well the task prescribed by Him, and in making the most, for our own good and the world's, of what He has given us, whether it be little, or whether it be much. (*J. J. Ingram.*)

Ver. 12. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes.—Self-righteousness condemned:—There is a whole generation, not merely a few individuals, of self-justified sinners. **I. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS HEATHEN.** But he has very serious and pitiable disadvantages. He has but the law of nature, with a few rays of Divine truth which, through tradition, have broken in upon his darkness. **II. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS JEW.** The modern Jew is precisely where the Jew who rejected Jesus as the Messiah was in St. Paul's days. **III. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS INFIDEL.** He worships reason, and he thinks that he has the only rational religion. He is his own standard of perfection. **IV. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS MAN OF THE WORLD.** One who pays very slight regard to externals—the mere forms of religion—and none at all to the internals. **V. THE PHARISEES AND SEMI-PHARISEES OF THE PRESENT DAY.** Those who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others; who mix together faith and works in regard to justification. **VI. THE EVANGELICAL PHARISEE.** Loud in his profession, censorious of the world, and also of humble Christians who feel doubt and hesitation, not professing quite so much. His faith does not work by love, nor purify the heart. Such men have no constancy—they have not the vitality of the principle of grace rooted in the heart. (*J. Hambleton, M.A.*)

Vers. 18, 19. There be three things which are too wonderful for me.—The Christian evidence of teleology:—A confession of ignorance is always a hopeful sign. Only that which is necessary for man to know at the successive stages of his development, and which he could not find out by his own unaided powers, was disclosed through inspiration. So far from fathoming the depths of omniscience, the inspired writers often did not discern the full purport of their own utterances. They were the mouthpieces through which God spoke to enlighten the world during all time. Natural science can explain much related to the flight of the eagle and the movement of the serpent, and yet the real problem remains unsolved and seems to mock human skill. 1. In whatever domain of nature we look we find evidences of a wisdom and power which are above material forces and our skill in imitating them. 2. From the proofs of external nature, every rational creature comes into such relations with God that he must, unless blindly perverse, feel himself subject to Divine power, and under obligations to perfect obedience. 3. It is of our own choosing if we grovel in that which is mean and low, for we are constantly invited to a higher life, to purer thoughts, to nobler works. 4. Man is, however, still

subject to the difficulties of his environment, so far as his material nature is concerned. Birth into newness of life is by an energy which is beyond nature, both in its origin and in its working, but it is clearly seen in its effects. (*Jacob Cooper, D.D.*)

The way of an eagle in the air.—*The eagle*.—Four wonderful things about the eagle. 1. It is wonderful for its strength. Shown in its swiftness; the great height to which it flies; the heavy food it can carry. 2. Its sight. It can rise from its rest at noon, and go soaring up towards the sun. It can go on rising higher and higher, and yet all the time be gazing steadily at the full-orbed splendour which is shining round it. From its great height the eagle can see even a little hen walking about on the earth. 3. Its training. The parent eagles teach the young ones how to fly, so that when they grow up they may be able to take care of themselves. 4. Its safety. In its nest, on the top of some mountain peak, far away out of reach of danger. (*R. Newton.*)

Vers. 24-28. **There be four things which are little upon the earth, but they are exceeding wise.**—*The four wise things*.—Everything is full of lessons of wisdom.

I. THE ANTS. They know the time for work, and they do their work when the time comes. This is their wisdom. **II. THE CONIES.** What these lack in strength they make up in wisdom. They dart into their mountain fastnesses and are safe. Knowing their natural helplessness, they have the wisdom to make the rocks their habitation, and are stronger in their retreats than all the powers that may come against them. So there is a Rock for us: that Rock is Christ. **III. THE LOCUSTS.** Their work is nothing but plague and ruin; but it is not so much the character of their work, as the wisdom or system on which they do it, that is here commended for our observance and imitation. We too have an allotted work to do, and we must do it together. One man's work may by itself be little, but it adds to a great whole. **IV. THE SPIDER.** An example of private industry and ingenious, patient toil. She aims at no great and showy things. Learn the worth of assiduity in little things, humble spheres, and private duties. (*J. A. Seiss, D.D., LL.D.*)

Little but wise.—These words teach that wisdom is not measurable by physical magnitude. The elephantine and prodigious body may hardly have a soul at all. Wisdom—wisdom alone—is the true standard of measurement. The humblest life is greater than the sublimest art, and one spark of intellect is infinitely more precious than the most crushing animal strength. It is possible to be little and yet to be exceeding wise. He makes a wise use of nature who regards it as a book of Divine instruction. The ants “prepare their meat in the summer.” This is forecast. Some people seem to have no forecast; no power of turning the past into the prophet of the future. The ants know the time of their opportunity, and make the best of it. Every man has a summer. Life hath but one summer, as hath the rolling year. The conies “make their houses in the rock.” The tenant is weak, the habitation is strong. There is a law of compensation. In the universe there is a law of what I may term complement, a law which makes up to men, somehow, the thing that is wanting. Man must always look out of himself for this complementary quantity. God provides the Rock for the conies, and God provides a Rock for all weakness. The locusts “come forth all of them by bands.” A very beautiful and practical republic. They have no king, but every one of them has a little bit of kingliness in himself. Here I find combination, co-operation, going together, moving in bands. God hath called us to unity, co-operation. One man is not as good as another. There are men who cannot go in bands. The spider “taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' houses.” This means skill, and patience, and progress. Every man is set upon an ascending scale of human life. All the Divine movement is an upward movement. In all labour there is profit. The whole study becomes an argument. If God has given such wisdom to insects, how much more will He give it to men? If God commends so distinctly the right use of instinct, how bitterly will He complain of the abuse of reason! (*J. Parker, D.D.*)

The conies and the rock.—The text may be taken as illustrative of a twofold view of the people of God. On the one hand, the weakness of the Church; on the other hand, the strength of the Church. **I. THE WEAKNESS OF THE CHURCH.** 1. It is a collection of “feeble folk” in an historical sense. It has always been a poor, persecuted minority. 2. In a spiritual sense. The generic character of our race is summed up in two words—the “flesh is weak.” 3. In an experimental sense. They become feeble in their own estimation. 4. In a relative sense. As compared with their “ghostly enemies.” **II. THE STRENGTH OF THE CHURCH.** Not in itself, but in Him, the Rock of Ages, in whom it ever finds shelter and help. (*J. B. Owen,*

*M.A.) The compensations of Providence:—*God overbalances all seeming evil by compensatory benefits, so that what happens is never wholly unrelieved evil. 1. It takes time to realise the result of the Divine dealings. 2. There is no exposure in our lot over against which God has not set some refuge. 3. The providences of God have ever two sides. 4. It is to the compensations of Providence that we should pay increasing heed. There is some good on the way to us, even if it be borne in the arms of so unwelcome a messenger as suffering. The true art of living is to carve our fortune, be it what it may, into a ladder of ascent toward spiritual perfection, for God brings to us nothing that may not be for our good. (*M. McG. Dana, D.D.*)

*Great lessons from little things:—*I. GLANCE AT THE SEVERAL ALLUSIONS OF THIS SCRIPTURE. Ants show their wisdom in their social habits, their industrious workings, their sagacious foresight. In time of plenty they provide for scarcity. Instinctively foreseeing the evil, they set themselves might and main to get ready against it. The voice says to us, "Look onward. Now is the summer of grace, the gathering-time of salvation." The conies are full of timorousness and fear. They show their wisdom by running at the least sound of danger into the crannies of the rocks. This working of the law of self-preservation says to us, "Beware! Be not self-confident! Get away into the clefts of the rock Christ Jesus." The locusts go in well-marshalled and compacted companies. Union, harmony, co-operation are among the chief things in the economy of the locusts. One impulse stirs them. They all act, and act together. Ye are Christ's temple, and union is the cement that knits together the severed parts. Ye are Christ's army, and union alone can give solidity to its ranks and strike its foes with terror. The chief property of the spider's working is completeness—diligent, persistent completeness. Learn to have a purpose, and bend to it all your powers. II. LESSONS MINISTERED TO BY THESE TINY CREATURES. 1. The great law of self-preservation. 2. The necessity of regeneration. 3. They bear a message concerning Christian diligence. 4. And concerning Christian completeness. 5. The pointing of these little creatures is onward. 6. And they may teach us the importance of decision. (*H. J. Roper.*)

*The four wise things:—*I. THE ANTS. 1. Their weakness. Look at their size; their foes; the duration of their lives. 2. Their wisdom. This wisdom consists in foresight, diligence, prudence, and union. 3. Their teaching. The lesson is weakness made up for by industry. We are now to gather and appropriate the bread of life. II. THE CONIES. 1. Their feebleness. Physically: not armed by strength, or weapons, or armour. Intellectually: few creatures are more timid than a rabbit. They have no daring, no strategy, no idea of combined action. 2. Their strength. This consists in renouncing self. Their safety is to flee to a place of refuge. And as they are so weak themselves, they choose the strongest that can be procured. How wise would be feeble men if they would follow the same tactics. But it is the tendency of man to cling to his own thoughts and his own ways. Each thinks his own efforts, his own plans, his own productions better than his neighbour's. So, especially in religion, man is a feeble creature. If he attempts his own salvation his refuge shall be swept away. But if, knowing his own feebleness, he makes his dwelling in the rock Christ Jesus, he shall be safe. And what a home is that Rock! It contains not only shelter and protection, but provision and joy. III. THE LOCUSTS. Locusts are not pleasant creatures. They often accomplish much harm, as they appear in large swarms, and destroy everything they come across. Notice—1. Their principal characteristics. These are—(1) Contemptible insignificance. A dozen can be crushed in a man's hand or trod under his foot. They are poor, wretched, hideous creatures. (2) Utter worthlessness. They accomplish no good purpose, and afford neither pleasure nor profit to any. (3) Woeful destructiveness. All they accomplish is plague and ruin. The land may be a garden of Eden before them; they leave it behind a desolate wilderness. (4) Absence from restraint. They have no king. This might teach us how people who have no government and no restraint rush madly on in their course of destruction. But this is not the purpose of the wise man. Notice—2. Their remarkable power. Notwithstanding their evil purposes they accomplish mighty results, even though they be destructive. The wisdom which is commended to us consists in—(1) Their unanimity. They have no varied counsels. What one does all do. They have no politics and no parties or sects. If men were equally united, what might not be accomplished. (2) Their perseverance and determination. No obstruction can check their progress. People troubled with their ravages sometimes dig pits and trenches and fill them with water, or build piles of leaves and timber, which they set on fire. But the hordes rush on right into the water till

those behind walk on the dead bodies of their drowned comrades, or into the fires till they are extinguished by the moisture of their own bodies. Though uncounted millions perish in the front, there are always sufficient in the rear to fill up their places. Man has a work to accomplish—not of destruction, but of mercy. Many will fall in the effort; there must be martyrs. Christ Himself had to be a victim, but, though the world dig its trenches and Satan build up walls of fire, we are to go boldly, and, if need be, to fill the one with our dead bodies, or to quench the other with our blood rather than betray our Master's cause. IV. THE SPIDER. The lessons from the spider are here rather implied than indicated, but it will be interesting to select a few from the many thoughts which this remarkable insect suggests. Here is—1. Unostentatious toil. The spider does not court public gaze. The generality of the world is not particularly favourable to his presence. The bird would snap him up; the housewife would sweep him away. He is contented to do his own work without exciting either admiration or envy. So, to quote a writer, "It is not the daring public act that makes a man great and distinguished; it is not the splendid oration that makes a man an orator, but the long and painful culture of mind, body, and soul." The spider is not seen, and yet he works. His work is all of the best. There are no slovenly threads, no unfinished corners. His web is geometrically perfect. He might catch his prey with a carelessly-made trap or an unsightly web, but he never attempts to do so. We may well learn to do the least thing we undertake with the best of our ability, and not to shirk our duties because we suppose that our work will not be observed. Assiduity in little things, humble spheres, and private duties marks the true man. The spider taketh hold with his hands. Hands were made to use. 2. Honoured safety. Industry will make its way in whatever sphere of life those who employ it may be placed. The great and good will carry out their life-work, even amid the discouragements of uncongenial greatness. (*Homilist.*) *Teachings from animate nature*:—The human soul has liberty to make everything within the compass of its knowledge, however insignificant it may be, to contribute to its growth, its happiness, and its perfection. The text teaches us to study animated nature for the purpose of gathering moral wisdom. I. EXPLAIN THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE AND DUTY PRESENTED IN THIS TEXT. The ants excel in foresight; in their social habits and economical arrangements they display admirable industry and sagacity. They apply themselves to the ingathering of proper food, and that at the most proper time. Conies are weak and timorous, having neither power nor courage to defend themselves against the assaults of their enemies. But they give an exemplary proof of the highest wisdom in "making their houses in the rocks," where their enemies can neither destroy nor disturb them. The sense of our indigence and weakness should drive us to the Lord Jesus Christ. In the union of the locusts great wisdom is displayed. Their concentration of aim and energy, the social combination of individuals, is an example to the sons of men. The spider is an illustration of patient perseverance in the use of means, in order to the attainment of a specific end. The work of the spider discover unity, proportion, and completeness. We should, like them, strive to surmount every obstacle, in order to gain our end and fulfil our object, which is to glorify God's name. II. APPLY THESE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR THE INSTRUCTION AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHERS. 1. To the motives of the work. The love of the Lord Jesus, and regard to immortal souls. 2. To the duties belonging to it. Perseverance, condescension, and a spirit of love. 3. The difficulties attending it. Want of spirituality, pride. Apply to those who are engaged in the work; to those who have not yet begun; and to parents. (*Fielding Ould, M.A.*) *Spiritual diligence the source of happiness*:—Man is the most important and most interesting being in our world; this is shown in several particulars, but among other proofs of man's natural greatness is his power to seek and derive moral profit, not only from beings that are superior to himself, but also from beings greatly inferior in nature and destiny; his mind can spread itself over the length and breadth of creation. Thus the text teaches us to study animated nature for the purpose of gathering moral wisdom. I. IT IS PROPER TO GLANCE AT THE TEXT IN THE LIGHT OF NATURAL HISTORY. 1. The ants. "A people not strong." Cicero believed the ant furnished, not merely with senses, but with mind, reason, and memory. A remarkable phenomenon: the great God exists, works, and reigns in the little ant; it is an humble mediator between us and the Infinite. 2. The conies, or rabbits, "are a feeble folk." Every creature in the universe has the power of self-defence, every wise creature puts it in exercise.

The neglect of this power, in a moral sense, has been the ruin of our race; its restoration is the work of the Lord from heaven. 3. The locust. Many allusions to them in Scripture, especially a wonderful description in the second chapter of Joel; they give a fine specimen of union, harmony, and co-operation, social combination, &c. 4. The spider. An instance of patient perseverance to gain a specific end. In a spider's work is unity, proportion, and completeness, as much accuracy as if she knew all the laws of architecture and mathematics; so man should strive to surmount every obstacle to gain his point and fulfil his purpose. His great work is to glorify God, &c. II. IN A GENERAL VIEW OF THE WHOLE PASSAGE NOTICE THE GREAT MORAL TRUTHS WHICH IT TEACHES. "Ask now of the beasts, and they shall teach thee, and the fowls," &c., &c. (Job xii. 7). And what do the little creatures described in the text teach us? 1. That we ought to act according to our whole nature. They do so. These little beings carry out all the powers they possess, their whole constitution is at work; they never war against their own instincts, they never act inconsistently with themselves. Man acts wisely only in proportion as he acts agreeably to all the principles and powers of his own extraordinary constitution. There are many sorts of beings in existence; some of these beings are superior to ourselves: they act according to their entire nature. There are also beings which are inferior to ourselves; they likewise act according to their entire nature. Man does not do so; he has broken the order of the universe; he has broken his own peace, and brought his own nature to ruin; he is at variance with himself, with the creation, and with God: this is man's sin, his misery. The soul of man is not only a part of his nature, but the principal part of it; it includes moral consciousness: when our soul acts so as to govern absolutely and always every other part of our nature, it is then only we act according to the whole of our nature; man acts unnaturally when he acts as if he had no soul, no reason, no conscience, no law, no judge. Now, when is man acting according to the whole of his nature? When does he act wisely? (1) Man's greatest good consists in his restoration to the favour, image, and service of his God—in union with God. Look to God as your end, take care of your hearts in this matter, let your intellect and affections ascend up to God; make the Divine nature your great study, your true home, your eternal heaven. (2) To this end suitable means must be employed; there is the whole mediatorial system, &c. It is not the existence of Christianity, but its influence on our moral system, that can save us; as an abstract system, it can do you no more good than paganism, deism, or atheism, unless you make it the means of your ascension to God, its infinite author and end. (3) It is not enough that we know what our greatest good is, and what the proper means of securing it are; but we must employ these means in the time and manner which God requires. 2. The text teaches us that we ought to secure all the happiness of which our nature is susceptible. These little creatures do so. The text distinctly illustrates this; but—1. That God has provided happiness for every nature, and for every nature its own happiness. God's happiness is peculiar to Himself. It is like Himself—eternal, immutable, infinite, necessary. His is the happiness of creating, of reviewing, of contemplating His own universe and His own nature. His happiness is to pour out a living stream of bliss over His vast creation. Misery existing only in the creature is not eternal, is not necessarily existent, is not essential to the universe. But happiness is so; there must be felicity, for there must be God. God wishes you well—there should be no doubt about that; His language, His actions, His nature prove that. Men do not believe that God has provided happiness for them. Two things account for this—their own experience and their hard thoughts of God. 2. Man's happiness is to be obtained in connection with his own activity. The text suggests this idea. Man can arrive at moral pleasure only by the action of his own nature; activity is the means, though not the meritorious cause, of his spiritual perfection. Indolence of every kind tends to misery. 3. We ought not to be satisfied without obtaining all the happiness which the Divine mercy has provided for us. (*Caleb Morris.*) *Things that are little, but exceeding wise* (to the young):—Instinct is a sort of wisdom. 1. The ant teaches a lesson of providence or prudence. It looks forward into the future, and makes provision for what is coming. We are not to be over-anxious, but we are to look forward, make our plans, and take our measures. 2. The little coney, when it has once run into the cleft, has the whole strength of the mountain to protect it. Outside the rock it is helpless enough; inside the rock it is perfectly safe. The Bible speaks of Christ as the Rock of His people. 3. Weak by itself, the locust is strong in association with others. He

teaches us the power of association. Christ has gathered His disciples into a society; that brings responsibility on each one of us. 4. It is a lesson of perseverance that the spider teaches. No matter how we are laughed at or opposed, we must perseveringly keep on, if we are in the right way. (*Gordon Calthrop, M.A.*) *Little and wise* (to the young):—None are too little or feeble to fill some place in God's creation. The ants teach us to lay up treasure in heaven. Every temptation resisted, every act of kindness and usefulness done, every cross manfully borne, is so much treasure laid up in God's storehouse. The least suspicion of danger sends the conies scampering into their holes. So at every sight or sound of evil we should away at once to the Rock of Ages. The locusts teach us that, in order to act together, each one of us must keep his place, doing his duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you. The spider teaches us to lay firm hold on God's promises in Christ Jesus by the hand of faith, and spend life in faithful and loving work for God. (*J. E. Vernon, M.A.*) *Lessons from little creatures* (to the young):—I. THE ANTS. 1. Their houses or ant-hills. 2. Their foresight. General two ways of entrance and escape, and at these doors they place sentinels. 3. Their industry. They work all day long, and even by moonlight. They are diligent. 4. They provide meat in season. II. THE CONIES. Hawks and eagles prey upon them, so they never venture far from the mouth of their hole. Christ is our Rock; never venture away from His safe keeping. III. THE LOCUSTS. Very small, but very destructive. Work in bands. Very wise. It is not perhaps much that any one of you can do, but if you all unite in doing good you may accomplish a great deal. IV. THE SPIDER. A clever, busy creature. Very humble, yet so ingenious and busy that it finds room to live even in kings' palaces. It is a mean-looking creature, but it is diligent at its own proper work. The King's palace will find room for many poor, mean-looking creatures who did the work that Christ wanted them to do in this world cleverly and busily. (*G. B. Blake, M.A.*) *Locusts and lizards*:—I. The locusts of Syria and Arabia belong to the class of wise little folks that know how to COMBINE AND CONQUER (Joel ii. 7). Like grasshoppers, these resistless little creatures have long, gauzy, overlapping wings for sailing through the air, and a pair of long, jointed hind legs for leaping over obstacles on the ground. They are born in millions, and swarm in immense numbers among the hot sands of the desert. No sooner can the young locusts leap with ease than they marshal themselves in companies, like so many regiments of soldiers; and, by some unerring law of instinct, begin to march in one direction towards a fixed goal. They march steadily through valleys clad with living green and plains studded with brilliant wild flowers; and after they have gone the land is desolate as winter at Christmas. They climb walls and leap ditches like conquering armies millions strong; and in a single day blooming gardens are turned into barren wilderness. The trees are barked, vegetables and flowers are eaten up, vines are laid waste, and every green thing is consumed. Mountains they scale with amazing swiftness; they run up the faces of precipices, they cross rivers, and even penetrate walls of fire! Now, it is of these destructive creatures that Agur speaks. Strange that a good and wise man should ask us to imitate such voracious animals! But, mark you, he invites us to imitate their good qualities only. They are orderly and united. "The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands." There is no strife in their camp; they fight desperately, but they do not fight among themselves. Peace reigns at home. How quietly do these small, clever creatures preach to us of orderliness and union! They have no self-will, no egotistical conceits, no personal hobbies. Sour and sulky locusts are not known. Wanton and wayward locusts are never seen. The principle is, union is strength. Little people can work wonders, if they will only unite. If all the members of one family were united on the side of reverence and truth, they could put down all the lying and swearing in a village. And if all the members of the Church loved the Lord Jesus passionately, and united for the grand purpose of saving lost men and women, soon, very soon, the whole world would be brought within the fold of the Good Shepherd. II. The last weak and wise creature mentioned by Agur is the spider, or rather the LIZARD. "The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces." The Hebrew word for "lizard" is a curious and rare word, and the translators of the Bible thought it meant the spider, because spiders resemble lizards in these respects, that they are small and clever, ambitious and daring, and frequently found in royal houses. Moreover, it is better, because more accurate, to translate the whole verse: The lizard thou canst catch with thy hands (so small is it), yet is it found in kings'

palaces (so clever and ambitious is it). Lizards are charming little creatures, bright-yellow as the golden canary, and speckled like the young frog. They are wonderfully quick, nimble, and wise. They can run over the smoothest surfaces, and can even creep along ceilings like flies. Notwithstanding their littleness, they climb to the highest positions. Their power lies in their activity and agility, in their energy and alertness. Let all young folks imitate them, and they will rise to honour and influence. Dull, drowsy, humdrum people climb no mountains of difficulty, and sojourn all their days in the valley of humiliation. Success of the noblest kind has always behind it energetic toil, skilful, persistent labour. We cannot be lazy and good or great. Sir William Jones is the name of a great Englishman who could speak twenty-eight languages, while occupying one of the highest legal positions in India. In youth he was marvellously energetic and industrious, quick-witted, quick-footed, quick-handed, and daring; he did all things well, and triumphed over all difficulties. Dr. Thackeray, his tutor, used to say of him, "If that boy were left naked and friendless on Salisbury plain, he would find his way to fame and riches." And let us remember that the palace of the Great King, in the city of shining gold, can only be entered by active, energetic Christians. However little we are, however weak, we may climb high. (*J. Moffat Scott.*)

Vers. 29-31. There be three things which go well, yea, four are comely in going.—Going well:—To each of us is appointed a journey. It begins at the cradle and ends at the grave. To some the pilgrimage is measured by years, while to others it is but a matter of days. Whether long or short, it behoves us to travel it wisely and well. What is it to "go well"? What does the wise man mean? He calls our attention to certain objects, each of which he declares has a certain beauty in its going. Let us discover their teaching. I. "The **LION** is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any." Two qualities are indicated—**STRENGTH, COURAGE**. 1. Strength is a matter of very great importance. This world is an uncomfortable place for the weak. Go into the business world, into the professions, and success is very largely a question of power of endurance. The moral aspect of the question is especially important. Men were never so severely tried. Be strong! 2. The lion also teaches us the value of courage. Conscience is to be followed. New ideas call for champions. Popular evils are to be assailed. Be brave! II. What is the lesson of the **GREYHOUND**? 1. Celerity of movement. Life calls for haste. Too much time is lost. Men loiter. They fail in punctuality. 2. Certain varieties of the greyhound have not only great speed, but great scent. There is in man a quality which answers to this power of scent in the hound. We call it conscience, moral sense, spiritual discernment. It exists in varying degree. No man is more to be despised than he whose moral sensibilities are wholly blunted. III. What may we learn from the goat? 1. Notice his ability to attain to apparently inaccessible heights. Where others fail he succeeds. 2. Observe his security in places of peril. We want men who are safe anywhere—not only in the protected places, but in the places of danger as well. 3. See how he finds subsistence where almost any other animal would perish. Life is not alike to all of us. We do not all feed in green pastures. Blessed is he whose moral nature thrives not only in the luxuriant meadows, but upon the barren mountain-side. It is possible. IV. "A **KING** AGAINST WHOM THERE IS NO RISING UP." 1. Joseph Benson put it, "A king and his people with him." He has their confidence and support. Wanted, men in whom the world has faith! What a power is he "against whom there is no rising up." 2. A king, carrying with him everywhere the consciousness of royalty. *Noblesse oblige*. God hath appointed to us a kingdom. Go to it kinglike. So shalt thou "go well," and so at the end it shall be said unto thee, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." (*Homiletic Review.*)

Ver. 30. A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any.—The lion (to the young):—1. A lesson of moderation. When the lion gets enough to eat, he is satisfied, and does not go on killing either men or beasts for the mere love of killing. The Bible rule about moderation is given in 1 Tim. vi. 8. 2. A lesson of kindness. Some striking instances as illustration can be given. 3. A lesson of obedience. Illustrate from story of Daniel. 4. A lesson of gratitude. Illustrate by story of Androcles. (*R. Newton, D.D.*)

CHAPTER XXXI.

VER. 1. The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.—*The words of king Lemuel*.—I. THE FIRST THING THAT STRIKES US HERE IS THE MOTHER. "The prophecy which his mother taught him." 1. A mother's anxiety. What shall he be? Better not to be, than to turn out a bad man. Seekest thou great things for the little one by thy side? Seek them not; better is it to be good than to be great; to be obscure in holiness rather than to be conspicuous in sin. 2. This is a pious mother. "The son of my vows." It is a great thing to be the child of a good mother. We do not know the name of this mother—her son's nature we know. What eminent sons have ascribed all their distinction to their mother; but she is out of sight. He attains to fame; she is still unknown. II. THIS MOTHER TAUGHT HER SON THINGS PERTAINING TO CHARACTER. Men cannot command circumstances or facts, but they can preserve principles. Principles are like the piles on which you build bridges, or on which you construct railways over morasses and swamps. Principles are the piles of life. Unshaken convictions and principles are only found in profound minds. King Lemuel's mother left, as she might safely do, the technicalities of instruction to others; she looked after character; she laid the foundation strong in goodness. Women teach goodness better than men. There is the right power of woman. When the counsels of good mothers have been disregarded, how often those mothers have been avenged! III. THE PROPHECIES WHICH HIS MOTHER TAUGHT HIM. The words of Lemuel's mother are living still. In youth we love and are loved so quickly. Then love is pure—more of the heart and less of the senses, which all true love is. In noble natures, the purer the heart, the more it is purified by the love of God. Youth is the time for the choice between God and good, and Satan and evil. "Be sober," said this mother. "Do not excite the body, lest the body should rise against the soul and dethrone her." "My soul," said John Foster, "shall either be mistress in my body, or shall quit it." Never were young men in more danger than now. 1. Young men waste time. The wise man must "separate himself." Ill habits gather by obscure degrees. 2. Young men fail in high principle. You see how everything goes down before things of money value. It is hard to reckon things by another than a money value. All fast living means low thinking, or nothing at all. These are the men who see nothing in religion, because they know nothing about it. Our sanctification must be wrought out where we are, not where we are not. Life is serious and earnest, but let us not despair over its failures, even though they abide with us to the close. "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Walk with them in their books, in solitude, in meditation, and join their company at last. (*E. Paxton Hood.*) *The counsels of a noble mother to her son*.—The identity of this man Lemuel is lost in the mist of ages. A motherly ministry is the tenderest, the strongest, most influential of all the Divine ministers of the world, but when the ministry is the expression of a genuinely religious nature, and specially inspired by heaven, its character is more elevated, and its influence more beneficent and lasting. The counsel of this mother involves two things. I. AN EARNEST INTERDICT. With what earnestness does she break forth! Her motherly heart seems all aflame! Her vehement intuition is against animal indulgence in its two great forms, debauchery and intemperance; against inordinate gratification of the passions and the appetites. The reign of animalism is a reign that manacles, enfeebles, and damns the soul. Lust blunts the moral sense, pollutes the memory, defiles the imagination, sends a withering influence through all the faculties of the moral man. II. AN EARNEST INJUNCTION. She enjoins social compassion. Some think in the phrase "ready to perish" there is an allusion to the practice of administering a potion of strong mixed wine to criminals, for the purpose of deadening their sensibility to suffering. But there are ordinary cases of suffering and distress where wine might be administered with salutary effect. What this mother inculcates is compassion to the poor. It is the duty and honour of kings to espouse the cause of the distressed. This mother enjoins not only compassion, but also justice. She is a model mother. (*David Thomas D.D.*)

Ver. 8. Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.—*The sin of cruelty to the brute creation*.—There is no necessary reference in this verse to the inferior animals. We use it merely for our accommodation. That there is such cruelty requires neither proof nor argument. What

persuasions should urge to guard against this cruelty in every form? 1. The affecting consideration that the lower animals have not the power of expressing and complaining of their wrongs. 2. Their subservency to the comfort and happiness of man. 3. They are the objects of God's peculiar and providential care. 4. Cruelty to animals is utterly inconsistent with the spirit and law of Christianity. (*David Runciman, M.A.*) *Job's example*:—Job was an excellent pattern to all princes. He was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, and a father to the poor, and no doubt he was a mouth also to the dumb. Such a prince the mother of Lemuel wishes her son to be. She exhorts him to do justice and judgment to all his people, but to regard with peculiar tenderness those unfortunate men that were in danger of losing their estates and lives by reason of accusations brought against them. If they were unable, through ignorance, or awkwardness, or fear, to plead their own cause, she would have him to be their advocate, and to plead everything that truth and equity would allow on their behalf. But charity to the poor, and clemency to the accused, must not interfere with the due administration of justice. It is the business of princes, in the administration of justice, to see that the poor do not suffer. (*George Lawson, D.D.*)

Vers. 10-27. **Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.**—*The prophecy of Lemuel's mother*:—There was never yet a woman who did not wish to have some part in the choice of her son's wife; and the mother of king Lemuel was no exception to the rule. She knew the kind of woman that would make him happy, and she contrived, by some means, to instil the knowledge into the heart of her son. It is a fact, which should ever be before the minds of mothers, that their sons are naturally disposed to love and revere them. This should make all mothers walk warily, and lead them to the source of every good, so that, having sat at the Master's feet and learned of Him, they may go back to their children with His Spirit shining through their eyes, and guiding alike their thoughts, emotions, and actions. The question with which this panegyric begins is rather a startling one. "Who can find a virtuous woman?" Were good women scarce then? and are they rare now? Devoted women, unselfish women, domesticated women, are not too easily discovered. Where a woman's heart is true, and her hands are gentle, where her voice is kind and her eyes far-seeing, where she lives not to herself nor to the world, but to the little circle whose happiness she makes, or to the God who has chosen her lot, there is the virtuous woman of whom the wise man spoke. Nothing so damps the ardour and joy of a man or his children as an incompetent, faulty woman at the head of the household; and nothing can be a greater source of strength than the woman who gives an impulse to all that is good and right, and checks the evil by a significant look or a softly-spoken word. Good women are wanted everywhere. (*A Woman's Sermon to Women.*) *Woman's work*:—The figures of women which pass across the pages of the Old Testament have so much nobility and so much character that even the slight sketches of them in the Bible have always impressed the imagination, and awakened the art of mankind. There is that in the New Testament woman which, in the past, has lifted womanhood into the worship of the world, and in the present has been the foundation of all that has been given to her, and of all that she has won for herself. In this chapter is the image of the perfect wife, done in poetry. The woman here has the attributes of wisdom, for strength and honour clothe her, and her future is secured by it. Her common speech is full of it, and the wisdom of speech is love. So wise is she that trust is safe in her. Her wisdom wins love for her; her children bless her, and her husband praises her. She is the active manager of business as well as of the household. She has her own prosperity, her own work in life; and her charities, which are many, are her own. This is the Jewish ideal of womanhood, yet the Jew of the Old Testament fails to find any ideal for womanhood beyond wifehood and motherhood. Only portions of this belong to the notions which women have in England of wifehood and home. Each class of society—according to the amount of money it can allot to the household—has its own separate ideal of the function of wives and mothers. In every case loveliness and loving-kindness and wisdom and the making of the beautiful, and the adornment of life should be by women combined with work. There is an inexhaustible capacity in women for this twofold life, and for complete success in it; but the idea of it is not as yet justly conceived, and there is no steady education for it. A thousand prejudices stand in the way of such a conception, and of the individual and free effort that it needs. The working class girls find

their work so heavy and so long, that they have not strength of body or leisure of soul to learn what belongs to wifehood and motherhood. There is scarcely any class so neglected, so overworked, so put upon by others, so worn out before they are thirty years old. But there are thousands of women who can never marry and never have a home. If they cannot be mothers, let them have the means to be eager, living, and active women, able to work for one another, and for the world; able to invent new work and new spheres of work, fitted for womanhood's special aims and powers, and for the advance of the cause of humanity. This earth should be a fitting place and home for humanity. It is not that now, and one of the reasons, and it may be the most important of them all, is the imprisonment of the energy of womanhood, both by men and by themselves, in a narrow individualism. ✓ (Stopford A. Brooke, LL.D.)

The model woman.—The chief points commended in the description may be impressed if we deal with woman's love, work, care, charity, speech, and praise. I. HER LOVE. Shown not in professions and demonstration of affection merely, but in trying to occupy faithfully her place. It is far better to show love than merely to speak it. So God wants to see our love to Him in its signs. II. HER WORK. Kinds of work for women differ according to their condition in society; but every woman should have her work. A woman's work is first the feeding and tending of her household; beyond this she may be able to work so as to earn. Show how much there is that young women can do towards a living in these days. All should try to be independent. III. HER CARE. In the ruling of her household; finding for each member work, food, and appropriate clothing. Watching that nothing is either wasted or lost, and everything made the best of. IV. HER CHARITY. Caring for the poor, and distributing of her abundance to them. How important, as an example to the children, is a generous, charitable mother! V. HER SPEECH. Always prudent and kindly. Never gossiping, never slandering, never hasty or passionate. Ever firm but gentle. See how often otherwise good characters are spoiled by the unbridled tongue. VI. HER PRAISE. It comes from her husband, from her children, and even from her God.

"Supreme love to God, which is religion, is that which generates, animates, and adorns all other virtues of character." (Robert Tuck, B.A.) *The worth and work of woman*.—By a virtuous woman is meant one who is characterised by a number of positive virtues and excellences, and chiefly by piety, or the fear and love of God. Illustrate this subject by the life of "Carmen Sylva," Queen of Roumania. I. THE WORTH OF WOMAN. "Far above rubies." Let a man ask himself

✓ what would be the worth to his heart, to his home, to his children, to society, of such a woman as is described here—the ideal woman of God's Word, the woman that every woman would be if she only feared God, loved His Word, imbibed His Spirit, and moulded her character upon His most blessed teachings. 1. Consider the worth of such a woman as a daughter. This is the first relationship in life woman is called to fulfil. Who can estimate her worth to her parents, or to her brothers and sisters? She is not wilful, headstrong, passionate, selfish; but humble, respectful, dutiful, affectionate. The foundation of true womanly worth is piety, the fear and love of God. Without true religion the character has no basis. Where that is found we may expect all the virtues to flourish into beauty. 2. The worth of such a woman as a wife. Here is an elaborate description of her housewifely care and prudence, and industry, and economy, and the blessed effects of all this on the happiness of her husband's heart and home, and on his character, reputation, and prosperity. Oh, that young men would look for piety in their wives! Nothing like that to govern their tongues, and to sweeten their tempers, and to make them amiable, pure, and true. II. THE WORK OF WOMAN. Home is her sphere, and her work is to make home happy. Some women think their work is to reform and regenerate the world. So it is, but the proper sphere for their reforming work is not in the publicities of the world, but in the privacies of the home, in their little children's nurseries, and by the side of the domestic hearth. I hold the worth of unmarried women in high esteem. They are of the greatest value to society, and especially to the Church of God. No single woman need pine in ennui for want of useful occupation. (Richard Glover.) *Far above rubies*.—The Bible, which is the great reservoir of the rights of man, is also the storehouse of the rights of woman. Woman's Magna Charta is the Word of God. It teaches us to honour woman; it warns every man that if he degrades woman he degrades himself, and that everywhere man rises as he lifts woman up. This text is a woman's estimate of what woman should be. All the parts that women have contributed to the Bible are poems; this is no exception.

I. THE DOMESTIC QUALITIES OF WOMAN. The question of the text is indeed a warning that the kind of woman about to be described is a model not always attained. It is not every woman whose price is "far above rubies." In ancient times the women made the garments which their husbands wore. We call the unmarried woman a "spinster"; and the word wife means a "weaver." It is the woman who keeps the house together. This is the description which a woman gives of a woman's domestic qualities. She must be wife, she must be lady, she must be housekeeper.

II. THE PERSONAL QUALITIES OF THE MODEL WOMAN. It is said that she is strong. As far as her strength is the result of careful and conscientious attention to the laws of health, it deserves to be described as a virtue, and a virtue that ought to be cultivated. If the future race of men is to be strong, the present race of women must first be strong. Then she is industrious. She not only saves the money others have entrusted her with, and uses it well, but she uses her own energy until she sells her own merchandise, and her industry increases her possessions till they become such that the watch-lamp has to be lighted that at night they may be secure. Strong and industrious, she could afford to be generous. But though she is generous, she is provident. She is also elegant, a lover of beauty. Ruskin says, "A woman's first duty is to please, and a woman who does not please has missed her end in life." She is beautiful in her speech. She should take an interest in everything that interests every man in the house. She is kind, but orderly. She keeps discipline.

III. LOOK AT HER REWARD. "Her husband praiseth her." "Her children call her blessed." The sweetest, daintiest, purest blossoms of a woman's heart will only flourish when she is praised by him she loves best. This is the true reward of the true woman. Her character is the secret of her power and her reward. (*W. J. Woods, B.A.*)

A virtuous woman:—

1. The person inquired after. A virtuous woman is a woman of strength. Though the weaker vessel, yet made strong by wisdom and grace and the fear of God. A woman of spirit, who has the command of her own spirit, and knows how to manage other people's, one that is pious and industrious, and a helpmeet for a man. A woman of resolution.
2. The difficulty of meeting such an one. Good women are very scarce, and many that seem to be so do not prove so.
3. The unspeakable value of such an one, and the value which he that hath such a wife ought to put upon her, showing it by his thankfulness to God, and his kindness and respect to her, whom he must never think he can do too much for. (*Matthew Henry.*)

*Religion for every day—Our wives:—*To the young womanhood it may be said—Your capability to fulfil the offices of womanhood will be proportioned to your worth of character, and to the use you have made, or are prepared to make, of your opportunities. Earnestness of life is the only passport to satisfaction in life.

I. AS A WIFE, REALISE YOUR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY. The husband is the head of the household; but a wife's position does not imply inferiority. She is her husband's companion in life and for life, to be regarded by him as his equal. The husband is the bread-winner, the wife is the bread-keeper and distributor. In all the affairs of domestic life the wife should maintain her position and influence. She should insure her authority by proving her ability to do what the office of a wife demands. Never for a moment permit your husband to feel that he may not trust the concerns of home to your care. Act in such a way that instinctively he will know his property, his honour, his happiness, are safe in your hands.

II. CULTIVATE ALL WOMANLY EXCELLENCES. Strengthen and enlarge the best side of life, by developing everything in you that is good. There are certain virtues essential to the ideal wife. Be thoughtful. Be industrious. Be restful. Be loving. A sublime self-forgetfulness lies at the bottom of every noble life, and of every great service wrought for human good. Homely and commonplace as this ideal may seem, it will demand all your resources. What has been urged cannot be attained without time, judgment, care, patience, and the constant aid of Divine grace in adaptation. (*George Bainton.*)

A noble woman's picture of true womanhood:—

I. MARK HER CONDUCT AS A WIFE. Here is inviolable faithfulness. The husband trusts her character and her management. Here is practical affection. Genuine wifely love seeks the good of her husband, is constant as nature. Here is elevating influence. Her words have inspired her husband with honourable ambitions, and her diligence and frugality have contributed the means by which to reach his lofty aims. Here is merit acknowledged. There are men who are incapable of appreciating the character or reciprocating the love of a noble wife. Blessed is the man who has found a wife approaching this ideal!

II. HER MANAGEMENT AS A MISTRESS. Notice her industry. Diligence in useful pursuits

should be the grand lesson in all female education. III. HER BLESSEDNESS AS A MOTHER. In the spirit, the character, and the lives of her children she meets with an ample reward for all her self-denying efforts to make them good and happy. Her children's lives are a grateful acknowledgment of all her kindness, and in their spirit and conversation she reaps a rich harvest of delight. IV. HER GENEROSITY AS A NEIGHBOUR. Her sympathies are not confined to the domestic sphere. They overflow the boundary of family life—they go forth into the neighbourhood. V. HER EXCELLENCE AS AN INDIVIDUAL. She was vigorous in body; elegant in her dress; dignified and cheerful in her bearing; devout and honoured in her religion. Religion was the spirit of her character, the germ from which grew all the fruits of her noble life. (*Homilist.*) *The virtuous woman as a wife*:—She is a wife. The modern conception of a woman as an independent person, standing alone, engaged in her own business or profession, and complete in her isolated life, is not to be looked for in the Book of Proverbs. It is the creation of accidental circumstances. However necessary it may be in a country where the women are largely in excess of the men, it cannot be regarded as final or satisfactory. In the beginning it was not so, neither will it be so in the end. If men and women are to abide in strength and to develop the many sides of their nature, they must be united. It is not good for man to be alone; nor is it good for woman to be alone. There are some passages in the New Testament which seem to invalidate this truth. The advocates of celibacy appeal to the example of Christ and to the express words of St. Paul. But the New Testament, as our Lord Himself expressly declares, does not abrogate the eternal law which was from the beginning. And if He Himself abstained from marriage, and if St. Paul seems to approve of such an abstinence, we must seek for the explanation in certain exceptional and temporary circumstances; for it is precisely to Christ Himself in the first instance, and to His great apostle in the second, that we owe our loftiest and grandest conceptions of marriage. There was no room for a personal marriage in the life of Him who was to be the Bridegroom of His Church; and St. Paul distinctly implies that the pressing troubles and anxieties of his own life, and the constant wearing labours which were required of the Gentile apostle, formed the reason why it was better for him, and for such as he, to remain single. At any rate the virtuous woman of the Proverbs is a wife; and the first thing to observe is the part she plays in relation to her husband. She is his stay and confidence. (*R. F. Horton, D.D.*) *The excellent woman*:—In this final chapter of Proverbs we have celebrated in poetic numbers the wife and mother in practical life. Each age has its own ideal. Study this ideal in outline and in detail. Strength, energy, activity, is here the main thought. Foresight, industry, and business capacity are desired. A virtuous woman is a woman with virtue; that is *vim*, strength. The virtuous woman is virile without being masculine. The virtuous woman, whose price is above rubies, is, like the ideal man, to walk after the law of God in every footstep of life, as well as in every lengthened path of continued duty. Love to God creates a holy ambition. It spurs her on to be what Jehovah intended our first mother to be—a true helpmeet. Full of the detail of daily industry and household management, she is yet far-sighted. Methodical, wise-hearted, kindly in discipline, her household moves like the order of the heavenly bodies. Woman's strength may be in her tongue, even more than in her arms and hands. This edged tool, growing sharper by constant use, must be consecrated, else it will kill more than cure. The secret and spring of such a character as that of the virtuous woman is the fear of the Lord. This fear—reverence mingled with love—is a well-spring of life. Watered by this stream, all fair flowers of grace, and fruits of character grow. (*W. E. Griffis.*) *The excellent woman*:—Three things concerning woman as she is portrayed in the Proverbs. 1. Her power both for good and evil is emphasised. She is recognised as important in the social structure. 2. Her position, as portrayed here, gives us a high estimate of the life of the Jews as a nation. You can always tell a nation's character from the character of its women. 3. The Jewish woman was a wife and mother. She took the place God made for her, and filled it excellently; and in that for any one in any place lies the highest success in life. I. THE VIRTUE MOST DEALT WITH HERE IS INDUSTRY. Look at this model woman, accepting with a cheerful and masterly mind the place God has given her, bound to do her best to satisfy its conditions, and so destined to genuine content. To work is God's intention for us, and if we have any thought of wishing to live for Him, work will not be to us an episode so disagreeable that we are to escape from it as soon as possible, but rather that for which we are made, and that

in which we ought to be most at home. II. THE MODEL WOMAN IS EFFICIENT IN THE MANAGEMENT OF HER HOUSEHOLD. The word "virtuous" refers not so much to purity as to adaptation to the place where God has put her. The meaning is, "Who can find a capable woman?" Her capability is shown in her addressing herself in strength to the exigencies of her place. It requires wisdom to do anything well. The ideal woman uses her good sense to advantage in the management of the home. Nothing is more worthy of one's most acute thought than the inconspicuous duties of the home. III. THIS IDEAL WOMAN IS FULL OF ENTERPRISE. There is something very homely and natural in this portrait of the thrifty housewife turning an honest penny when occasion offers. This is the overflow of her exuberant interest in the prosperity of her household. Her business enterprise is not a sign of her seeking new interests outside of the home, but on the contrary a sign of her greater devotion to it. Home over everything, everything for the home, is her idea. IV. THE IDEAL WOMAN IS SYMPATHETIC. She does not forget the poor. Her vigorous mind does not make her a hard, calculating person of business. She is still a woman, full of sympathy for the unfortunate, ready to help the unsuccessful. Back of the calculating mind lies the warm, throbbing heart, thrilled with the highest emotions. V. THE IDEAL WOMAN IS WISE OF SPEECH. She is the counsellor of the household, giving good advice and teaching them that kindness which is life's truest wisdom. The easy running of home affairs makes a great difference in the happiness of every one. Home is where the character of the children is being formed. The widest empire does not offer a more dignified throne for the exercise of high wisdom than the mother's seat in the home. The results of such a good woman's life are visible. She has a happy husband. She has appreciative children. She has a good name. May God give to many a girlish heart a new dream—not of fair, but of good women, that shall reproduce itself in a strong, gentle, wise life. (*D. J. Burrell.*) *A helpful wife*:—Writing of the greatness of Mr. D. L. Moody, Professor Drummond says: "If you were to ask Mr. Moody—which it would never occur to you to do—what, apart from the inspirations of his personal faith, was the secret of his success, of his happiness and usefulness in life, he would assuredly answer, 'Mrs. Moody.'" *An industrious wife*:—Mrs. Henry Clay, the wife of the celebrated American statesman, during her husband's long and frequent absences from home at the seat of government, used to take the reins into her own hands at the farm. She made a practical study of agriculture, oversaw the overseer, and became an oracle among the farmers of the neighbourhood. Preparatory to Mr. Clay's departure from home, she invariably received from him a handsome cheque, which she as regularly restored to him upon his return, with the laconic remark that she found no use for it! (*J. B. F. Tinting.*) *A good wife*:—A good story is told of the famous plaid, without which Blackie was rarely seen. One day, at Dr. Donald Macleod's house, he said, "When I was a poor man, and my wife and I had our difficulties, she one day drew my attention to the threadbare character of my coat, and asked me to order a new one. I told her I could not afford it just then, when she went, like a noble woman, and put her own plaid shawl on my shoulders, and I have worn a plaid ever since in memory of her loving deed!" (*Memoir of J. Stuart Blackie.*) *And worketh willingly with her hands*.—*Beautiful hands*:—As a young friend was standing with us noticing the pedestrians on the sidewalk, a very stylish young lady passed us. "What beautiful hands Miss — has!" exclaimed our friend. "What makes them beautiful?" "Why, they are small, white, soft, and exquisitely shaped." "Is that all that constitutes the beauty of the hand? Is not something more to be included in your catalogue of beauty?" "What more would you have?" "Are they charitable hands? Have they ever fed the poor? Have they ever carried the necessities of life to the widow and the orphan? Has their soft touch ever smoothed the irritation of sickness and the agonies of pain? Are they useful hands? Have they been taught that the world is not a playground, or a theatre of display, or a mere lounging-place? Do those delicate hands ever labour? Are they ever employed about the domestic duties of life? Are they modest hands? Will they perform their charities or their duties without vanity? Or do they pander to the pride of their owner by their delicacy and beauty? Are they humble hands? Will their owner extend them to grasp the hand of that old schoolfellow who now must earn her living by her labour? Are they holy hands? Are they ever clasped in prayer or elevated in praise?" (*Christian Treasury.*) *She layeth her hands to the spindle*.—*Homely attainments*:—There is a trite but apposite moral in the anecdote told of James

I. on having a girl presented to him who was represented as an English prodigy because she was deeply learned. The person who introduced her boasted of her proficiency in ancient languages. "I can assure your Majesty," said he, "that she can both speak and write Latin, Greek, and Hebrew." "These are rare attainments for a damsel," said James; "but pray tell me, can she spin?" **She maketh herself coverings of tapestry.**—*Needlework*.—Whenever (said Dr. Johnson), whenever chance brings within my observation a knot of young ladies busy at their needles, I consider myself as in the school of virtue; and though I have no extraordinary skill in plain work or embroidery, I look upon their operations with as much satisfaction as their governess, because I regard them as providing a security against the most dangerous insnarers of the soul, by enabling them to exclude idleness from their solitary moments, and, with idleness, her attendant train of passions, fancies, chimeras, fears, sorrows, and desires. **She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.**—*The nobility of womanhood*.—1. Tact is evidently the characteristic of one who "openeth her mouth with wisdom." She is not one whose garrulity proves the truth of the proverb, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," for she has sufficient sense of the seriousness of life to avoid utterances which are idle and thoughtless. Her words are the dictates of that wisdom, the beginning of which is the fear of the Lord. Nor does she merely speak wise words, but, with true wisdom, she recognises that "there is a time to speak and a time to be silent," so that her reproofs and encouragements live long in grateful memories. 2. But authority is quite as important as tact, and this is characteristic of one who has a "law" in her lips. Suppleness in management is of little value unless there be strength behind it. God never meant that women should be always yielding to other people's opinions, or that they should be swayed hither and thither by every passing breeze of emotion. As much as men they need firmness, the royal power of rule, for in the home, in the sick-room, and in the class they have a veritable kingdom in which to exercise authority for God. 3. It must not be forgotten, however, that the authority here spoken of is the law of kindness. Such, in the highest sense, is the authority of Christ over His people. The noblest rule requires, not the display of force, nor the terrors of foolish threats, nor the counterming of a suspicious nature, but the law of kindness, which is obeyed because it evidently springs from love and is enforced by love. Gentlest influences are by no means the feeblest. The spring crocus can be crushed by a stone, but, unlike it, the crocus can push its way up through the stiff, hard soil, until it basks in the sunshine. The light of the sun does not make noise enough to disturb an insect's sleep, but it can waken a whole world to duty. Those who have been able to win or to retain the affection and trust of others exercise a power which angels might desire. (*A. Rowland, LL.B.*) *A soothing voice*.—Yes, we agree with that old poet who said that a low, soft voice was an excellent thing in woman. Indeed, we feel inclined to go much further than he has on the subject, and call it one of her crowning charms. How often the spell of beauty is rudely broken by coarse, loud talking! How often you are irresistibly drawn to a plain, unassuming woman whose soft, silvery tone renders her positively attractive. In the social circle how pleasant it is to hear a woman talk in that low key which always characterises the true lady. In the sanctuary of home, how such a voice soothes the fretful child and cheers the weary husband! (*C. Lamb.*)

Ver. 28. Her children arise up, and call her blessed.—*The children's praise*.—This is part of the just debt owing to the virtuous woman. It is enough to make virtuous people happy that they are blessed of God. Yet this is thrown in as the reward of virtue, that among men also ordinarily it hath its praise. The praise that attends the virtuous woman comes from her own children. 1. It is a great comfort to those who are good themselves to see their children rising up. Here rising up means, stir up themselves to pursue the same course as their good mother. 2. The children of the virtuous woman call her blessed. It is her honour that she shall be praised by them that are best acquainted with her and most indebted to her. I. THE CHARACTER of those parents to whom honour is due from their children. 1. Those that are truly wise deserve praise. 2. Those that are truly kind. 3. Those that are industrious and careful. 4. Those that are charitable. 5. Those that are virtuous; that is, sober and temperate, just and righteous in their conversation, exemplary in integrity and uprightness. 6. Those that are pious and religious towards God. II. THE DUTY OF CHILDREN IN DIS-

CHARGING THEIR DEBT TO THEIR PARENTS. 1. Maintain a grateful remembrance, and, on occasion, make honourable mention of our godly parents. 2. Give thanks to God for them. 3. We ought to be very sensible of our loss when such parents are removed from us. (*Philip Henry, M.A.*) *The blessing of the pious mother*:—The family is the profoundest and most sacred of all our social relationships. It is a type of spiritual relationships, and a means of realising them. In this delineation of the excellent woman the influence of the mother is more especially recognised. The distinctive honour of the pious mother is that she receives the benediction of her own children. They do her honour, speak of her with reverence and love and blessing. What must a mother be in order to inherit such benediction of her children? Notice her prudent regulation of the affairs of her household; her kindness, gentleness, and benignity; her piety. The religiousness that influences a child is the religiousness of common life, the religiousness that is the life that imbues all things with its feeling and sanctifies all things with its presence. Urge upon young women the present cultivation of such a character as will make them wise and holy mothers. (*Henry Allon, D.D.*) *Gratitude for a good mother*:—Mrs. Susannah Wesley was a model mother. The wife of a country curate, she brought up her large family so well that all Christendom has cause to bless her name. At her death her children gathered around her bed and sang a hymn of praise in gratitude to God for such a mother. She is called the “Mother of Methodism,” so much did her famous sons John and Charles Wesley owe to her influence and training. General Garfield said that his was a model mother. When young and headstrong he obtained work on a canal boat against her wishes. One dark night, when alone on the boat, he fell overboard. It was in a lock, where the water was deepest. He could not swim, and was sinking when his hand touched a rope hanging over the side, apparently by accident. He climbed on deck and found that the rope was only held by the slightest twist round a block. He felt it was God’s hand which had saved him, and resolved to start for home at once. He found his mother and described his miraculous escape. “What hour was it?” she asked. He told her, and she said, “At that very moment I was praying for you, my son, that God would protect and bless you.” And in after-life Garfield used to say, “I owe everything to my mother.” *Her husband also, and he praiseth her*.—*Gratitude for a good wife*:—The Earl of Beaconsfield said, “Every step in my life to honour and success I owe to my good and faithful wife.” President Lincoln, on receiving a presentation, said, “I will hand this to the lady who, by her counsel and help, has made it possible in anywise for me to serve my country.” A working man at a great meeting said recently, “My wife was a good woman before her conversion, but now she is worth her weight in diamonds.” When Jonathan Edwards was discharged from his appointment he came home in despair. But his wife smiled bravely and said, “My dear, you have often longed for leisure to write your book, and now it has come. I have lighted a fire in your room, and set the table with pens and paper.” He was so cheered that he set to work at once, and wrote the book that made him famous. (*S. M. Evans.*) *A wife praised by her husband*:—The late Robert Moffat had a wife of rare excellence. For more than fifty years she shared his toils in South Africa. The Secretary of the London Missionary Society says, “After their return from Africa, while talking over their labours at the Mission House, Mrs. Moffat said, ‘Robert affirms that I do not hinder him in his work.’ ‘No, indeed,’ replied Dr. Moffat, ‘but I can affirm that she has often sent me out to missionary work for months together, and in my absence has managed the station better than I could have done myself.’ Her husband’s first exclamation on finding her gone was, ‘For forty-three years I have had her to pray for me.’”

Ver. 29. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.—To daughters:—The world has dealt severely with woman. It has always been too fashionable to distort her character, and with cruel cowardice cast on her the entire blame for all the ills humanity endures. Long ago it was declared that “if the world were only free from women, men would not be without the converse of the gods.” Even Chrysostom pronounced woman to be “a necessary evil, a national temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic peril, a deadly fascination, and a painted ill.” There is still an Italian proverb to the effect, “If a woman were as little as she is good, a pea’s pod would make her a gown and a hood.” Similarly the Germans say, “There are only two good women in the world—one of them is dead, and the other is not found.” So Englishmen sometimes say, “If there is

any mischief you may rest sure that a woman has to do with it." It cannot be denied that the devil employed woman to accomplish the ruin of the race; that by her he disturbed Abraham's home and heart, cast innocent Joseph into prison, robbed Samson of his strength, brought life-long trouble upon David, seduced Solomon into idolatry, caused John the Baptist to be beheaded, and drove Paul and Barnabas from Antioch. But let us go over to the other side, and deal fairly with woman. Whilst we hear the harsh voices of men shamefully reviling our Saviour we cannot discover an instance of a woman insulting or injuring the God man. Whilst men—even the favoured disciples—forsook Christ and fled, women responded readily to the loving appeals of Jesus, clung constantly to His person, ministered self-denyingly to His needs, and watched patiently and persistently at His cross. Remember that "many daughters have done virtuously." It is not a few who stand before us for our admiration and gratitude. It is a glorious galaxy of pure-minded, consecrated women to whom the Church and the world are, and ever will be, indebted. And, further, recollect that they became what they were, and accomplished what they did, by personal effort. They strove to excel. They reasoned thus: "The thing is right, reasonable, desirable; circumstances demand that it should be done; therefore, with all my heart I will do it or fail in the effort." Hence the words of the wise man. "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." The words seem to picture before us a racecourse with women runners—the goal, perfect virtue; the course, three-score years and ten; the umpire, God; the spectators, men and angels. We see the maiden entering the lists before she reaches her teens. Young, innocent, inexperienced, and trustful, she begins the race; we watch her pressing on through youth, adolescence, and old age. Now surpassing some who started with her, then being surpassed by some who began long after her; now level, abreast of scores of equals, then outdistancing her competitors. To-day passing one barrier of temptation, and to-morrow scoring another victory. Not stopping for some fading allurements as Atalanta did, but adding one excellency to another until it is said of her: "Many daughters have run well, but thou hast outrun them all; many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Young women, I ask you each to enter on this holy competition. Let me say, then, that you should cultivate affection for, and obedience to, your parents. We have known cases in which daughters have been callously absorbed in thoughts of themselves whilst all sympathy for the anxious and ageing mother has been wanting—where the young woman has deemed it beneath her to help a hard-tolling parent. I beseech you to remember that next to God you cannot love too deeply and lastingly those who have so sympathetically watched over and waited upon you. Never suffer either parents or friends to have cause for pronouncing you idle or indifferent to home claims. Be as careful what books you read as you are with what persons you associate. Above all, acquaint yourself with the Scriptures. And do not be ashamed to have it known that you pray. It is a lofty honour to commune with the Infinite Father. (*J. H. Hitchens, D.D.*)

Ver. 30. A woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.—*A woman worthy of praise*:—This text recognises the fact that a woman seeks admiration. She loves to be praised. What is so natural and universal cannot be wrong. Generally speaking, a woman who has lost the desire of praise is a lost woman. Her self-respect has gone, and she has parted with her strongest motive to strive after personal excellence. A woman wins her way and strengthens her influence by the admiration she commands and the affection she inspires. Praise is more necessary to the right growth and happy development of human character than is commonly supposed. We do each other a moral wrong by withholding it when deserved. The desire to be commended may be thought an unworthy and selfish motive. It is unworthy when the heart is satisfied with the praise of foolish people. Very important it is whose praise we seek. All dishonest gains are bad. To claim commendation when we are conscious of not deserving it, or even to accept it without protest, is mean and destructive of personal integrity. To seek the honour that cometh from God, to deserve well of the good, can only spring from sympathy with goodness. The text glances at means of winning admiration which you must not rely on. "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain." The praise these will bring you is not worth coveting. Beauty of form and feature is almost always a snare when it is not an index to beauty of soul. A woman should not place her worth in these outward advantages. She is to aim at a higher beauty, to seek to be beautiful in the eyes of Him "who seeth not as man seeth." Three things

should guide you in dress—truth, order, and harmony. You violate the rule of truth if you ever dress so as to be mistaken for what you are not. You should never purchase what will have an ill look when it is shabby. If you do you violate the law of order. You offend against the law of harmony if what you have on excites remark. A woman is dressed harmoniously when her dress seems part of herself. As the world is, marriage is the goal of a woman's existence. Marriage makes or mars a woman. Girls whose chief talk is about young men merit severe reprobation. On this matter good advice may be summed up under three heads: Think little. Talk less. Do nothing. It will be time enough for you to think what your chances are and whom you will marry when the question comes before you in a practical form. This advice is based upon sound reasons and justified by manifold experiences. Piety is the bond of feminine virtues, the crown of womanly graces. A cold theology of intellectual ideas will never satisfy you. The religion that will command your devotion and obedience must offer a living person to your faith and loyal affection. The gospel offers you the Lord Jesus. Translate the description of fidelity, kindness, industry, and prudence given in this chapter into the language of to-day. Picture to yourselves this model of womanly excellence set in the duties and circumstances of your own lives, and then aim to be like her, for such will be the woman that feareth the Lord, and whom He will deem worthy of praise. (*E. W. Shalders, B.A.*)

Woman's praises and virtues.—I. HER VIRTUES (vers. 11-27). Her conjugal fidelity; her kindness and constancy of affection; her housewifery and diligence; her thrift and management; her industry and assiduity; her charity and liberality; her providence and forecast; her magnificence in furniture and apparel; her reputation in public; her traffic and trade abroad; her discretion and obligingness in discourse; her care of home and good government of her family. II. HER PRAISE. At home; in public; through the whole country where she lives. Prove virtue to be the only praiseworthy thing. Favour and beauty are frail, and subject to decay in their nature and in the opinions of men. They are things that may be counterfeited and put on. They prove too frequently occasions of evil and incentives to sensuality. The good woman prizes favour and beauty under three conditions. Not so as ambitiously to seek them or fondly to vaunt them. Not so as to rely on them as solid goods. Not so as to misemploy them, but to guide them with virtue and discretion. Praise is sure to come to the woman that "feareth the Lord." The woman has equal rights with man. A virtuous woman may mean a stout, valiant woman; or a busy, industrious woman; or a woman of wealth and riches; or a discreet woman. In its principle, this "fear" is a reverential fear. In its operations, like the warp, it runs through the whole web of all her duties. Such a woman shall be praised. (*Adam Littleton, D.D.*)

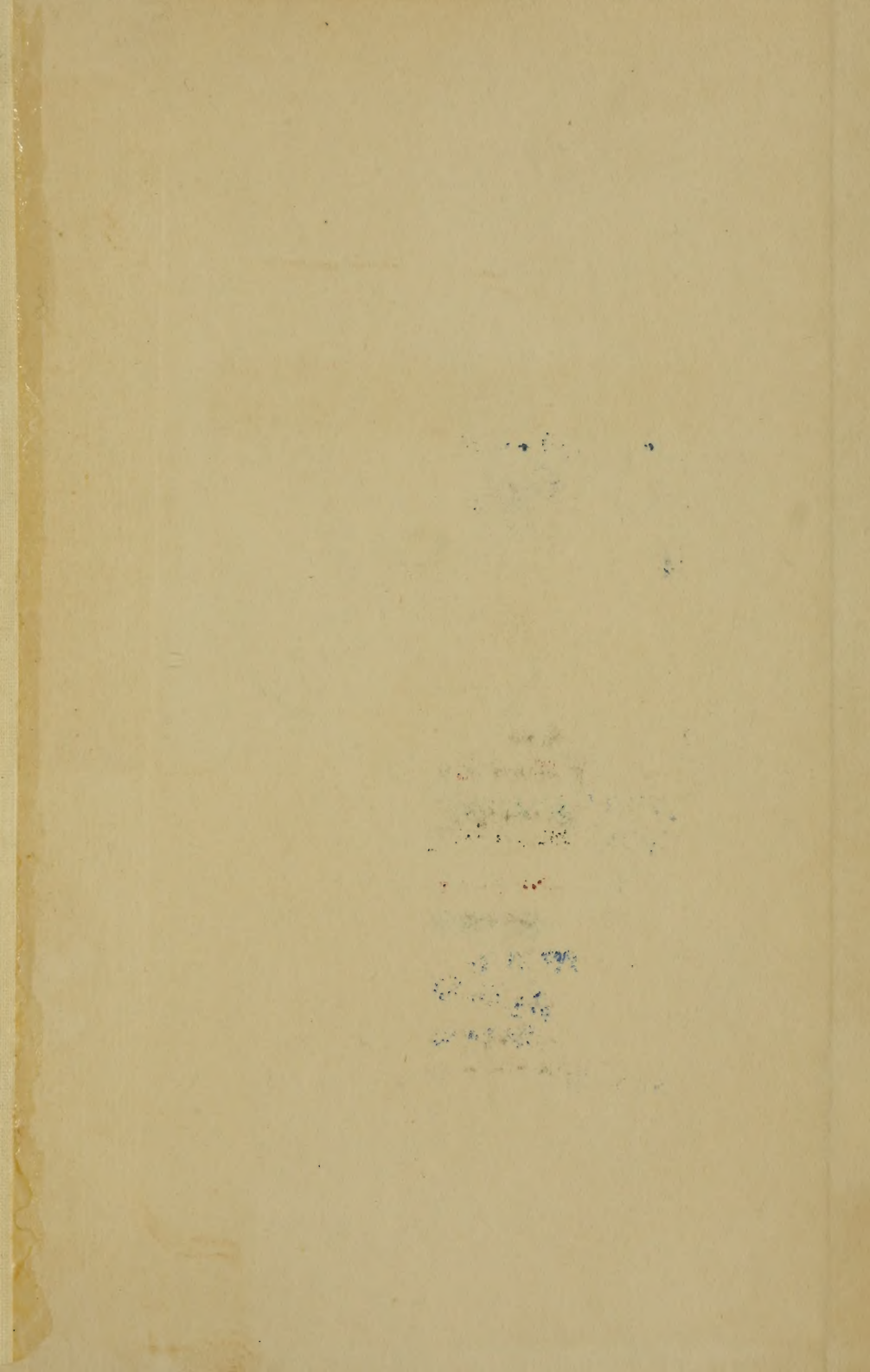
Beauty and goodness.—I. THE APPROBATION TO BE DESIRED. The love of approbation is at once a virtuous and a powerful motive. It includes the approbation of God and of good men. Some, however, cherish the love of approbation too much, and will sacrifice principle in order to obtain it. It is a dangerous thing to have the approval of every one; it is apt to make us careless, proud, or indifferent. II. THE FALSE MEANS WHICH ARE SOMETIMES RELIED ON TO SECURE THIS END. "Favour" means a graceful manner, demeanour, and deportment. "Beauty" refers to the countenance. We may thank God for beauty of person and elegance of manner as for any other of the blessings of this life. Used rightly, beauty may be a virtue, but perverted it becomes a source of great and awful evil. III. THE CERTAIN AND ONLY ROAD TO APPROBATION. The woman who wishes to be praised must cultivate religious principle. Women are apt to attach undue importance to the external and to neglect the spiritual. Beauty without goodness passes away like a vapour, and leaves no trace behind; or if it succeeds in being remembered, it is only that it may be despised and abhorred. (*Clement Dukes, M.A.*) *Woman's virtues*.—As virtues of the true matron there are named, above all, the fear of God as the sum of all duties to God; then chastity, fidelity, love to her husband without any murmuring; diligence and energy in all domestic avocations; frugality, moderation and gentleness in the treatment of servants; care in the training of children; and beneficence to the poor. (*Melancthon.*) *Woman's influence*.—I. FAVOUR IS DECEITFUL. Men's favour, the world's favour, how fickle it ever is, how soon it changes, and what a short time it exists! How many souls have been ruined by the world's favours! Flattery has produced pride, and has blinded the eyes and led the steps along the downward way. II. BEAUTY IS VAIN. We need not disparage beauty in itself. Beauty of form and feature is of God. But how short-lived mere beauty of face is! Sick-

nesses lessen it, increasing age denies it, afflictions spoil it. III. WHAT SHALL GIVE US POWER AND INFLUENCE FOR GOOD? Fearing the Lord. This makes the highest and grandest type of woman. (*Uriah Davies, M.A.*) *Lasting love*:—That love which is cemented by youth and beauty, when these moulder and decay, as soon they do, fades too. But if husbands and wives are each reconciled unto God in Christ, and so heirs of life and one with God, then are they truly one in God each with the other, and that is the surest and sweetest union that can be. (*Archbp. Leighton.*) *Woman retaining honour*:—"A gracious woman retaineth honour." That is, a woman distinguished for her modesty, meekness, and prudence, and other virtues, will engage affection and respect when other accomplishments fade and decline. (*B. E. Nicholls, M.A.*) *Woman: her dues and her debts*:—There is among men no general agreement as to what exactly woman is, or means, and what precisely she is for, and rather less agreement among her own sex. Woman has been a great while in finding her place, and slow in even suspecting that any place of power and dignity is her due. Woman has been cautiously conceded to have powers of thought, or to be susceptible to a degree of discipline, but those susceptibilities have been regarded suspiciously and handled evasively. In higher social classes woman is considered rather in the light of a delicacy; as no true constituent of the bone and sinew of society; more an ornament than a utility, like the pictures we hang on our walls, or the statuary we range in our alcoves—a kind of live art. A womanly woman is feminine by nature, more feminine by grace, and will be consummately feminine by translation. What it lies in the nature of a thing to become is a providential indication of what God wants it to become by improvement and development. An uneducated woman is as much a mistake as an uneducated man is a mistake. By education is meant, first of all, womanliness, built out of alternate layers of intelligence sharpened by discipline and integrity, chastened by the manifold graces of God. A young woman, as much as a young man, belongs to her times. The beauty of a home and the strength of a home is that it is the product of affectionate co-operation and conspiracy between the prime partners to the contract. Society has not yet made any improvement on the marriage idea as it is laid down in the second chapter of God's book—that the wife is to be her husband's helpmeet. The hope of civilisation is the home, and the hope of the home is the mother. Characterless mothers and enervated homes are to be dreaded more than outward assaults of immorality or insinuations of a gross philosophy; for it is the enervation of the home that gives to gross philosophy and bad morality the opportunity to take hold and do its corroding and poisonous work. Civilisation would be kept as grand as the home is kept, and the keystone of home is the mother. (*C. H. Parkhurst, D.D.*) *The virtuous woman*:—Note—1. Her industry and activity. 2. Her benevolence and kindness. 3. Her prudence or discretion. 4. Her devotion to God. The importance of true religion as the crowning grace of womanhood cannot be over-estimated. (*Frederick Greeves, D.D.*) *Our mothers*:—Writing in her diary soon after the birth of her babe, Margaret Fuller put these words, "I am the mother of an immortal being. God be merciful to me a sinner!" A true woman cannot feel other than seriously the import of such an experience. Somebody has said, "She who rocks the cradle rules the world!" The world is what those constituting it make it. "Like mother, like child." How great and sacred are a mother's responsibilities! Her teaching and example are the most forceful agents in the formation of her child's life. Virtue is transmitted as well as evil. The good we do lives after us as potentially as the bad. The strong things in a mother's life pass on to the child as well as the weak. Let no mother say that her sphere is obscure or secondary. A noble ambition can fill no wider scope. Certain things are essential if you are wisely to fulfil your responsibilities of motherhood. 1. Endeavour to be what you would have your child become; in character, in morals, in religion. 2. Look well to yourself. Live what you teach. 3. Win the respect of your child. 4. Never let your child get beyond you in intellectual sympathy. Hearts may keep pace where heads cannot. Learn to sympathise with religious perplexities, and learn how best they may be eased and remedied. 5. Let your child be always certain of your love. Be faithful to your woman's instinct. Deal patiently and lovingly with your child. Keep the home life bright for him. Learn to respect his rights. Allow him room for the free play of the varied powers God has given him. Are you not assured of grace sufficient for all your mother-needs? (*George Bainton.*)

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